

The Maid of Bocasse

by

May Halsey Miller

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Frontispiece.

"Placing Himself Before Them He Drew His Sword."

The Maid of Bocasse

BY

MAY HALSEY MILLER

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"RAOUL AND IRON HAND"

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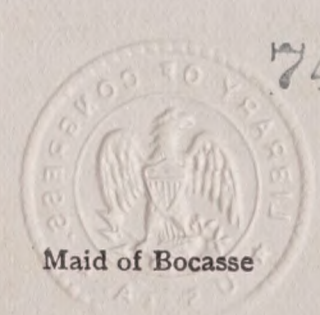
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Maid of Bocasse



INTRODUCTION.

THE Age of the Black Prince is one of the most fascinating periods of history. The times were so full of daring, adventure, and the display of physical prowess that they seem to belong by right to the romance writer, for romance is often more faithful to the spirit of the age than is so-called history. The social life of modern times is embodied in fiction; that of the past ages is embodied in romance, its characters being no less real because they present types instead of individuals.

The historical characters introduced in "The Maid of Bocasse" are presented with historical fidelity, no liberties being taken with dates or facts. Two heroic figures stand out in bold relief during the closing years of chivalry, an institution that had then served its purpose, and from which its strength had departed, while its weakness remained. The great characters, towering head and shoulders above their contemporaries, are Edward Prince of Wales, known as the Black Prince, and Bertrand du Guesclin, the gallant Breton knight. One typifies the outgoing age with its apotheosis of physical strength and deeds of

valor; the other, the new order that the invention of gunpowder inaugurated, when strategy overmatched valor, and the rank and file began to rise steadily in importance.

If sometimes the scenes appear improbable, it must be remembered that the achievements of to-day would seem not merely improbable but actually impossible to the actors in the dramas of the Middle Ages.

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THE MAID OF BOCASSE.

CHAPTER I.

THE SORCIÈRE.

THE market-place was astir with excitement. Groups of men and women were discussing with great volubility and exuberance of gesture some affair of unusual interest.

"She is a *sorcière!*" exclaimed a young girl called Toinette, whose black eyes gleamed brightly from under her dark capote, while the rich crimson of her vest vied in color with the glowing tint of cheeks and lips. "It is she who has brought this plague upon us!"

"Hist!" whispered an older woman. "She will hear thee, the old witch! Then thou'lt find thyself bewitched."

"There have been four more deaths since midnight. She has laid us under the spell of her evil eye!" exclaimed a burly peasant, pushing back his beret and crossing himself.

Just then the shrill piping voice of a child broke in:

"Only last night it was I who met her on the hillside when I went to fetch the cows. She did not see me; for I hid and watched her while she whispered her spells over the devil's herbs which she carried in her arms."

But the child was unceremoniously thrust aside by a handsome peasant with flashing eyes, and soft black hair that fell upon his neck in wavy masses.

"She is a wehr-wolf!" he hissed. "It is she who slays our sheep in order to gorge herself with their blood!" His tones were suppressed, and the peasants crowded more closely about him, their faces eager with fearsome curiosity.

"Tell us! Tell us!" they whispered.

Casting a searching glance about him, and meeting only familiar faces, Martin spoke in tones so low that those on the outer edge of the circle cried: "Louder!"

"It was this way," he began. "My lord count went hunting not many days since; and as no man knows about the haunts of wolf and bear so well as I, not even the head gamekeeper," and his head went back and his breast swelled with conscious superiority, "messire took me with him. I was ahead, my lord closely following, on the way up the mountainside, when suddenly a wolf, with eyes that

gleamed like pine knots, stood facing us. Quicker than thought she sprang up on to my lord's horse and in an instant would have dug her horrid white fangs into his throat had he not stopped her by plunging his dagger into her shoulder. With a cry of pain like a woman's moan, she slipped down from the horse to the ground and gazed upward at my lord count with tears streaming from her eyes and the blood flowing from the wound in her shoulder. Then she suddenly disappeared, and I heard the rustling of a woman's skirts." His tones grew more suppressed, the peasants crowded about him still closer to catch his words, while he peered uneasily around him. Then he continued in a sibilant whisper:

"When we got back to the château we found there a great commotion, for Nurse Alinore had been discovered lying unconscious on the floor of one of the store-rooms, with a gaping wound in her shoulder from which the blood was freely flowing. When they brought her to, she said she had been reaching upward while standing on a bench, and losing her balance, had fallen on to a platter which she was holding in her hand and cut herself with the broken pieces. But it is we who know. She had returned to the château unseen, had gone into the store-room for some unguent to put on her wound, and had fainted from loss of blood." And he nodded his head with a most sagacious air.

"But why should Nurse Alinore attack our lord, who is so good to us all?" asked a lad.

"Because of what happened before thou wert born," answered an elderly woman. "'Tis said my lord loved her before he married madame. It is true, madame has always treated her coldly, though messire compelled her to permit Nurse Alinore to become the foster-mother of our damozel."

"Has she, then, a husband?"

"She was married at the same time as messire, but her man went away to some war and never returned, while her babe died at birth two days after the birth of our damozel."

"Ah, but she is a sorceress, for I know that she can take on all kinds of forms and shapes, as well as make herself invisible. Just before my Margot died——" The woman stopped, for no one was listening to her, as at that moment a slight figure was seen running toward the group from the direction of the château upon the hill. It was a demoiseau, or page, from the castle. He would have pushed his way through the crowd on the market-place, but many hands were put out to detain him.

"What is it, demoiseau?" cried several voices at once.

"Messire and madame have just died, and I go for the lady abbess to comfort our demoiselle," he answered hastily. Wrenching himself free from their grasp, he ran across the square in the direction

of the convent, whose walls reared themselves at the other end of the market-place.

"The witch! The witch!" broke from a hundred lips as the boy disappeared. Then, as if by preconcerted action, the crowd of men and women turned toward the château and rushed up the hillside that led to the gates. Across the drawbridge, under the arched entrance, they ran, all animated by a single thought—to wreak vengeance upon her who had wrought this mischief. Through the vaulted gateway, across the courtyard, into the great kitchen they rushed, shrieking:

"The witch! The witch! Death to the witch!"

In the kitchen was the tall, slight figure of a seemingly old woman, who stood bending over a kettle suspended from a crane, under which a fire crackled and blazed. She was in the act of raising the lid from the pot as the peasants rushed into the room.

"Stew her in her devil's broth!" exclaimed Martin.

In an instant the woman comprehended the situation. She, the doctress of the château and its dependents, was considered accountable for the epidemic that was raging in the southern part of French Navarre, where the château and town of Bocasse were situated. There were only the scullions and kitchen servants at hand, who fled to one corner of the room before the mad rush of the infuriated peasants.

Dipping her ladle into the boiling, seething mix-

ture, the uncanny woman held it before her, saying in a shrill voice:

"He who but lays a finger on me will receive this ladleful of broth! Woe to him it touches, for it will burn into his very vitals!"

The peasants shrank back, for the moment cowed. Martin, however, soon recovered his courage, and moving stealthily behind, dashed the ladle from her hand, at the same time seizing her about the body and pinning her arms to her side. The woman gave a loud shriek. The crowd rushed upon her, their cries dominating hers. The uproar was deafening.

Unheeded, a young girl had entered the door at the farther end of the apartment and stood gazing with wondering eyes upon the scene of confusion, when she caught sight of the old woman struggling in the grasp of the peasant. Giving a loud cry, she sprang into the midst of the crowd. Instinctively they gave place to the demoiselle of the château. Obeying her imperative gesture, Martin released the old woman, who tottered, and would have fallen had not the young girl supported her with her arm. Tall, divinely tall and fair, the girl looked as she stood there in her flowing robes of white, one arm about the waist of Nurse Alinore, the other hand pointing with a commanding gesture to the peasants, her eyes flashing with indignation, her tones ringing with righteous anger.

"Cowards! Why do you come to a house of

mourning to attack a defenceless old woman who has done naught but good to you all?"

For an instant the peasants stood abashed under the fire of those flashing eyes. Then Toinette, advancing a few steps, said deprecatingly:

"Pardon, damozel, but she is a sorceress, and her touch carries mischief."

"Her touch bring mischief to me! To me, whom she has tended all these years!"

"And killed madame your mother and messire your father," muttered Martin.

"Who said that?" demanded the girl, hotly.

"It was I, damozel; for did I not see her in the very act of springing upon my lord?" At these words the suspended fury of the peasants burst forth anew.

"Kill her! Death to the sorceress! She will also harm our damozel!" cried a dozen voices, and a dozen hands tried to drag Nurse Alinore from out the protecting clasp of Lady Yvette's arms. Frantic, helpless, desperate, she struggled with the almost maniacal peasants. "To the rescue! To the rescue!" she cried. "Henry! Antoine! François!"

As if in response to this despairing and desperate cry, there came a clanking of steel and a jingling of spurs. Then was heard a stentorian voice, which thundered out:

"Halte-là! What are you doing?"

The newcomer caught sight of Lady Yvette's face. Hurling himself against the struggling mass of hu-

man forms, he thrust the peasants to the right and left, and in a trice was beside the frantic girl who was trying to ward off their attacks from the body of the now unconscious woman who lay at her feet. Placing himself before them both, he drew his sword and charged upon the peasants, driving them across the courtyard, through the archway, over the bridge, and then bade the warden shut the gate.

Meanwhile Lady Yvette called to the frightened kitchen maids and bade them tenderly lift her old nurse and carry her to her chamber. In her distress, Lady Yvette had scarcely noticed the stranger who had come so opportunely to her aid.

By this time some of the guards of the château made their appearance, and the young châtelaine told them in future to attend more faithfully to their duties. Even the dreadful calamity that had just befallen did not afford excuse for failure in the performance of duty.

When the stranger returned from driving the peasants out of the château, he found in the kitchen plenty of servitors, but no Lady Yvette.

"Where is Messire de Bocasse?" he inquired. "How is it that the gates are unguarded, and that the young lady should be in so great peril?" He spoke as one accustomed to command.

"There is no longer a lord of Bocasse," sadly replied the captain of the guard, whom the disturbance had brought to the scene.

"No longer a lord of Bocasse!" repeated the stranger knight. "Him have I come to see."

"Until this very morning was there a lord, also a lady; now there is none but the Lady Yvette."

"Some sudden calamity, messire?"

"Even so, Sir Knight; for in one hour have both our lord and lady died. It is indeed a house of mourning to which messire has come."

"Accept my sympathy, messire. But I have come on a mission of great importance to the Count of Bocasse from his royal highness the Prince of Aquitaine."

"Ah, Sir Knight, heavy indeed is our affliction that there should be no longer a lord of Bocasse," was the sorrowful response.

"Indeed were that a sad pity."

"The Lady Yvette is now the only representative of the noble and ancient house of Bocasse."

"Do daughters inherit in Navarre?" asked the knight, in surprise; for in the kingdom of France, of which at that time Navarre formed no part, an estate reverted to the overlord at the death of all male issue.

"That is as the king wills," was the reply.

The dinner hour was at hand. In spite of the tragical events of the morning, the meal was spread as usual on a long table in the centre of the banqueting hall.

"Messire will not depart without accepting the

hospitality of Bocasse?" asked the captain of the guard.

The stranger knight hesitated a moment, then accepted the invitation to remain to dinner, for he was curious to see more of the menage of Bocasse. The officers of the household, the waiting-women, the squires, and pages took their respective places. At the head of the board were three empty chairs. Two of the usual occupants were now no more, while the third, Lady Yvette, remained in the seclusion of her chamber. The stranger knight was accorded the seat of honor, being of the highest rank of all present, as could be seen by the splendor of his apparel, and who had announced himself to be Messire d'Ambricicourt, of the suite of the Black Prince, the Duke of Aquitaine.

Hardly had they begun to eat when the clatter of horse-hoofs was heard in the courtyard. Presently there appeared in the hall the lady abbess, attended by Raimond, one of the pages of the late lord of Bocasse. As she entered, all arose and stood silent while she murmured a blessing and passed through the apartment on her way to the Lady Yvette.

While Sir Gaston d'Ambricicourt was eating and drinking, he deplored within himself that so fair a fief should be without a lord. Then there entered his head an idea that was long in departing therefrom.

On rising from the table at the conclusion of the

meal, he called for his horse, after bidding the captain of the guard inform the châtelaine that he would return later to pay his respects and to acquaint her with his mission from the puissant Lord of Aquitaine. Then, accompanied by his attendants, he rode out the castle gates.

The Gascon knight made his way down the hillside into the town, on through its tortuous narrow streets to the market-place, beyond which was the inn where he lodged, and which lay under the shadow of the large carven portals of the great Gothic church that was the pride of the town of Bocasse. He rode slowly, for the bustle of the market-place on market day diverted his thoughts. He stopped ever and anon to say a chaffing word to the pretty peasant girls, whose dark skirts and capotes and gayly colored vests, with the adornment of many-hued ribbons, gave a picturesque character to the ever-shifting groups about the stalls on that bright September day.

Presently a particularly comely face attracted his attention. It was that of Toinette, whom he recognized at once. The recognition was mutual. At first the girl shrank back as if in fear. However, on seeing no anger in his face, but, instead, admiration for her striking beauty, she pouted a little and held up the hem of her short upper skirt to a scratch on her cheek that she had received in the recent skirmish.

Dismounting, Messire d'Ambricicourt approached the girl, and taking away the hand that held the skirt, he lightly touched with his lips the cheek that had received the wound.

"*Voila*, it is well now, is it not, *petite?*" he said. "Thou shouldst not mingle with so clownish a set and run the risk of marring thy pretty face."

"Ah, messire knows not what he has done this day," she replied, with a coquettish upward glance.

"How so, my pretty one?"

"Messire cannot know that Nurse Alinore is a sorceress, and has worked her evil spells upon us, and has caused our dear honored lord and lady to die this very day. *Mon dieu*, the next to suffer will be our damozel, whom we all love."

"*Nom du diable!* Was it a witch I rescued?" he exclaimed ruefully. "It was in the service of the fair demoiselle that I thought to wield my sword so lustily."

"Messire has in truth done ill," returned Toinette, with another upward glance into the handsome face leaning over her; "for he has left our damozel in deadly danger."

"Then will this be the sword that shall succor her!" To the disappointment of Toinette, he remounted without taking further notice of her, and clattered up the street. Busy were his thoughts. Fortune came only to him who sought it. The domain of Bocasse was without a lord; the Sieur

d'Ambricicourt was without a fief worthy his deserts. The maid was in need of a protector. Was ever fate more propitious? He would succor the maid, win her, and take the domain. The idea recommended itself so powerfully to his humor that he then and there vowed the lady and estate should have a lord, and that right speedily.

CHAPTER II.

THE INTERVIEW.

To see a handsomer man than Gaston d'Ambricicourt, a Gascon knight attached to the court of the Black Prince at Bordeaux, one would have to travel far and long. Born of a Gascon father and an English mother, he inherited the type of both nations so combined as to produce a specimen of remarkable physical beauty. His magnificent physique and clear, smooth skin gave evidence of his English ancestry; while his dark hair and eyes, the brunette tinge of his complexion, showed his Southern blood.

So accustomed was the handsome knight to exciting the admiration of the fair sex that he accepted it as his just due, and thought but little of a lady's favor; for favors lightly won are lightly worn. His patrimony being small, he had become a knight of fortune and had attached himself to the court at Bordeaux, hoping to win both fortune and renown. Renown was already his, but fortune still eluded him; for no matter what baron, knight, or squire he overcame on the battlefield and made his captive, the

ransom was soon lost at dice, in handsome apparel for himself and rich accoutrements for his steeds.

The days that followed his first visit to the château passed slowly enough. There were no pastimes such as engaged the attention of a valiant lord, only dice; nor were there those who could put up stakes worth the winning. Twice did Sir Gaston send a squire to the castle beseeching an audience with its lovely châtelaine; twice was answer returned that Lady Yvette was yet in seclusion. However, there came the day when the lady sent word that she would receive the Gascon knight the following morning.

Sir Gaston d'Ambricicourt donned his richest apparel. Knightly indeed did he appear in his crimson velvet doublet, crimson trunks, long silken hose, crimson capote from which floated a long white feather, and white silk mantle, embroidered in crimson and gold, which was suspended from one shoulder. His coal-black charger was caparisoned also in crimson and white with gold broideries. Followed by his small retinue, Sir Gaston rode up to the gate of the château, where he was received with fitting formality. He was conducted up the broad stairway to a large vaulted oak-panelled apartment. At the upper end was a dais. On it stood the Lady Yvette clad in flowing robes of white silk, her long fair hair braided with ribbons and pearls, and falling in two broad braids on either side of her face. Stately as

a young queen she stood awaiting the approach of the knight, who strode with confident mien and uplifted head toward the dais. The heart of the maid beat a little faster as she noted the beauty of his face and the elegance of his figure.

On reaching the foot of the dais he bowed low; and then drawing himself up to his full height, met the glance of those beautiful fearless eyes that were on a level with his own on account of the slight elevation of the platform on which she stood.

"Madame," he began, "his royal highness, the most noble and puissant Lord of Aquitaine, has sent me to the late lord, your father, to request his good services with his majesty, the King of Navarre, in whose favor he is known to have stood high."

The Lady Yvette bowed her head courteously, as she answered:

"Gladly would my father have served the Lord of Aquitaine had he lived. But what was it that his highness would have had him do?"

"Dear my lady, there are matters of great import now astir. His gracious majesty, Don Pedro of Leon and Castile, has been deposed by his brother, Don Henry of Transtamare, who has risen in open rebellion against his brother and lawful king, compelling him with his two daughters, most lovely princesses, to appeal to the chivalry of the Black Prince for succor. Him has the powerful prince decided to replace on his throne. His message to the

late Lord of Bocasse was beseeching his good services with the King of Navarre that he will hold to the treaty that has already been drawn between them."

"It is true that his majesty held my dear father in high esteem; still, the king in matters pertaining to his kingdom decides for himself. Why did not the noble prince send to him rather than to the late lord, my father?"

"It is well to have a friend at court, dear my lady. Fair are the promises of his majesty, but—" he hesitated.

"The memory of princes is short," she completed his sentence.

"Madame has said it."

"It were a pity that my father had not lived, for more than one reason," and the lovely eyes filled with tears that were hastily brushed away. Then with a wave of her hand, as if to dismiss the subject, Lady Yvette smiled charmingly upon the knight, and said:

"Our thanks are owing you, Sir Knight, for the timely assistance tendered us a day not so long passed. Without your aid might my good nurse have been roughly handled before the guard could have been summoned."

The knight took the slender white hand extended toward him and raised it to his lips.

"Would I could have done a million times as much to serve so fair a lady," he murmured.

The young châtelaine quickly withdrew her hand, a soft flush suffusing her beautiful face. She clapped her hands twice or thrice, and attendants at once appeared bearing great covered platters which they placed upon the damask-covered oaken table at the lower end of the long apartment. At a gesture from the lady, the knight took her hand and led her down the length of the chamber. Raimond carried her train, and stood behind her highbacked chair while she ate. The other members of the household seated themselves at table according to their rank after the lady had taken her place at the board with the knight at her right hand.

Gracious indeed was the Lady of Bocasse to the envoy of the Black Prince, who exerted all his charms of manner, all his power to fascinate, in order to win the heart of the châtelaine of the fair domain of Bocasse.

In spite of her recent affliction and the deep grief felt at the loss of her parents, Lady Yvette acted her part of gracious lady of the castle most potently; so that before he left that board, the knight's heart, as well as his ambition, was deeply concerned, and high were his hopes as he wended his way back from the château to the gloomy inn under the shadow of the great Gothic towers of the church. Plainly had he been shown that his visit was not unwelcome, and determined was he that it should be oft repeated before he returned to Aquitaine.

Feeling in no mood to remain within doors, he changed his raiment, and taking with him a single squire rode off for a swift gallop over the hills. On his return, he overtook a girl driving homeward two cows. The poise of the head seemed familiar, and glancing downward into the face at his side, he met the coquettish glance of Toinette, whose cheeks took on a brighter hue at the sight of the handsome knight. He slackened his pace and walked his horse beside her, talking lightly as they went.

"So pretty a maid has many lovers," he said.

Toinette tossed her head, but made no other answer.

"Ah, none of them suit thy fancy?"

"That may be, and yet it may not," she replied with a pout of her pretty lips.

"Tell me, little one, if thou hast a liking for any lad, and when I am Lord of Bocasse, he shall not come to thee empty-handed."

Toinette looked up into his face in surprise. Interpreting her glance, he asked:

"Is there aught about me that should not please the lady?" Then taking a coin from his pouch he slipped it into her hand and bade her buy herself some trinket at the next fair; but, to Toinette's disappointment, he made no effort to kiss her, as on the previous occasion.

As the Lady Yvette laid herself down to sleep that night her thoughts were full of the stranger

knight. Loquacious had been his attendants among the maid's servitors, loud had been their vaunts of his prowess, and of his position at the court of the chivalrous Black Prince. These stories had been repeated to some of her women, one of whom repeated them to her lady when assisting at her disrobing for the night. Never had the young girl beheld so handsome a knight. Valiant and gallant, why should he not please a maid's fancy? There is no saying what might have happened had not Toinette repeated Sir Gaston's promise to her when he should become Lord of Bocasse to one of her lovers, who chanced to be a brigand in the service of Lady Yvette. He repeated the words with sundry additions to one of the serving maids; who in turn repeated them to one of the waiting-women, whose curiosity was aroused to so high a pitch that she adroitly questioned her lady, thinking that the marriage might already be arranged.

Now the Lady Yvette, though young in years, was most jealous of her prerogatives as Lady of Bocasse; and no sooner had she learned that already had the stranger knight boasted of his intention to become Lord of Bocasse than a great resentment filled her heart, and she vowed that knights should be shown their proper place by ladies, and one knight in particular should learn that he could not have everything for the mere asking.

A day or two later Sir Gaston d'Ambricicourt,

thinking he had given the Lady of Bocasse sufficient opportunity to yearn for his presence, again rode up the castle hill. At the gate, however, the warden informed him that madame had retired to a nunnery to pray for the repose of the souls of the late lord and lady, madame's father and mother.

This information considerably interfered with Sir Gaston's plans. Never had he expected to be balked in the very beginning of his suit in this manner. If he were not to see the lady, then how was he to win her?

There was no longer any excuse for the Gascon knight to remain at Bocasse. He must make his way directly to the court of the King of Navarre, and try to induce him to embrace the cause of Don Pedro instead of that of his brother Henry of Transtamare, whom he was known to favor.

The very next morning, Messire d'Ambricicourt, crestfallen and angry, attended by his small company of men-at-arms, set out for the castle where resided the Navarrese king. Traversing a gloomy, wooded country, diversified by forest ridges, vineyard slopes, and patches of bright green meadow land, the Gascon knight and his attendants pursued their way until evening.

Darkness coming on, it was necessary to find shelter for the night. But the squalid villages of wretched, rickety, and dirty hovels offered no inviting refuge to the small company who were accus-

tomed to the comfort and even elegance of the Bordeaux court. However, one must eat and sleep, so Messire d'Ambricicourt stopped before the least repulsive-looking of the huts, and demanded entertainment for the night.

The interior of the hut was as gloomy as the outside was dingy. It consisted of a large room with an earthen floor, and a ceiling of smoke-stained beams covered with thatch. The shutters of the unglazed windows were closed, and the air within was stifling, as the only means of ventilation was the chimney, and the only light came from the fire that smoldered on the hearth.

Their entertainment was of the poorest; and even that was given grudgingly until the knight showed a gold piece and promised it to their peasant host on condition that he would do his best for them. At the sight of gold the peasant's manner at once changed; he had expected neither payment nor thanks, as nobles were accustomed to take what they could get from the peasantry, giving in return what they would, which was oftenest nothing but kicks and curses. He brought from out a hidden recess some fairly good wine, and also food which his guests could manage to swallow when accompanied by copious draughts of the inspiring cordial.

They were on their way early the next morning, and reached their destination that same afternoon. On the edge of a rocky hill reared the turrets of the

castle where the king was for the time lodged. At the foot of the hill wound the waters of a forest stream, and beyond were the Pyrenees, their sharp, sawlike peaks and pinnacles standing out beautifully blue, or else purely white with their ice-crowned summits, in the bright September sun.

Ascending the hill, the knight blew a shrill blast on his horn as they neared the castle. In a few moments the warden appeared in his little tower surmounting the gates, and demanded the newcomer's business.

"I come from the court of Bordeaux with a communication for his majesty, the King of Navarre," was the reply.

The gates were opened, and the little cortege passed through. Dismounting at the entrance leading to the grand staircase, the knight, followed by two of his squires, accompanied the warden up the stairs through a series of noble state apartments, great vaulted chambers carved in oak and hung with tapestries, until they reached the ante-chamber that opened into the king's cabinet. Here one of the grooms of the chamber informed the knight that his majesty was below in the tennis court, and offered to escort him thither. Accepting the invitation, the knight was led down a private staircase into the tennis court, where his majesty was hotly contesting a game with a gentleman of his suite, the Count de Ste. Croix. It was not till the king had

thrown down his racquet that he was informed that a messenger from the Lord of Aquitaine awaited his pleasure.

"Thou'rt welcome," said the king graciously. "What will his highness, the Lord of Aquitaine, have of me?" But he did not wait for an answer; asking instead: "Dost play tennis?"

"I thought so, sire, until I witnessed your majesty's play," replied the knight diplomatically.

"Take a racquet then, and I'll teach thee."

The knight forced the king to play his best, though he purposely lost the game. This victory put his majesty in an excellent humor, and after supper he challenged Sir Gaston to a game of chess. Then were served spiced wine, sweet cakes, and comfits, after which came the *coucher*, and Sir Gaston d'Ambricicourt had not yet been permitted to broach the object of his mission.

The next day the envoy formally requested an audience with the king in order to deliver the message of his lord, the Prince of Aquitaine. It was graciously granted. Then Sir Gaston laid before the king the proposition of the Black Prince—that he should observe the articles of a previous treaty, in which he had agreed to ally himself with the Black Prince against his enemies. In accordance therewith, the Black Prince called upon his majesty, the King of Navarre, to withdraw his support from Don Enriquez of Transtamare, and to help reinstate

Don Pedro, the rightful king, on the throne of Castile.

Charles of Navarre demanded time for consideration, which Sir Gaston was obliged to concede. A week passed, and still the answer was delayed. The Gascon knight grew impatient, but dared not show his irritation, for the character of Charles was well known, as he was a faithless friend and a wily foe; but as his kingdom lay between Aquitaine and Castile, it was necessary either to conciliate him or intimidate him.

King Charles apparently was more concerned in giving his guest entertainment than satisfaction in regard to his mission. He ordered a wolf-hunt and a bear-hunt, for the Pyrenees were the haunt of both wolf and bear. He arranged for contests at arms with the stranger knight and the gentlemen of his own court, and devised all manner of diversion for the pleasure of his guest, the envoy of the Black Prince.

In all the chivalrous sports of that time Gaston proved himself proficient, eliciting the admiration of the king himself for his skill in shooting the bow, throwing the lance, striding an unruly horse, and in the pursuit of wolf and bear.

"In faith," said the king, after their return from a hunt, "a Gascon like thyself would do better to serve under the standard of the King of France or under that of myself, the King of Navarre, than un-

der that of an English prince. Thou shouldst be a man of the mountains rather than a hanger-on at the court of Bordeaux. Marry one of the fair maids of Navarre, and become a Navarrese lord," proposed the king, half laughingly.

"Your majesty is pleased to jest," replied the knight.

"But no; even have I a maid in my mind's eye for thee. 'Tis a fair domain of which I am thinking; its lord died without male issue. The fief, therefore, reverts to me. Marry the daughter, and the fief shall be thine."

"Your majesty has but to command," replied Sir Gaston, "though a fief would be more welcome without the maid than with her. But where may be this fair fief and this fair maid?"

"'Tis the county of Bocasse and the Lady Yvette," was the unexpected reply.

CHAPTER III.

THE MAIDEN KNIGHT.

At the reply of the king, the heart of the knight leaped within him, but fell as heavy as lead on second thought.

"The lady has already entered a convent, your majesty," he answered dejectedly.

"The maid of Bocasse a nun!" exclaimed the king. "Nay, she has the making of a valiant knight in her, but of no saint. In throwing a lance, striding a horse, or flinging the dart, she is the equal of many a knight."

"Still, sire, such was told me by the warden of her castle but three days before my arrival here."

"I will send and learn more of this matter," declared King Charles.

So he sent a messenger to Bocasse to inquire concerning its châtelaine, whether she had indeed entered a nunnery, and if so, if it were her intention to retire permanently from the world. In case she found she had no vocation for conventual life, the king took pleasure in acquainting her with the fact that he had already provided a husband for her ac-

ceptance, as gallant a knight as could be found in all Navarre, France, and England. The name of this gentleman was Gaston, Sieur d'Ambricicourt.

In four days the messenger returned with the answer of the Lady of Bocasse. It informed his majesty that his loyal vassal, the daughter of the late Lord of Bocasse, had gone into retreat but temporarily to pray for the repose of the souls of her dear parents. In regard to the new Lord of Bocasse proposed by his majesty, it must be as his majesty willed; yet would she beg to decline an alliance with one who changed lieges as one would a doublet that no longer served his needs. She was not for such a one; nor was he for her.

The king repeated the answer to the knight.

"And is the Lady of Bocasse a loyal subject to refuse to obey her liege, and to insult a true and faithful knight?" inquired Sir Gaston, hotly.

Again was a messenger despatched to Bocasse. This time he bore the ultimatum of her suzerain that she must either marry the lord he had provided to be her husband or retire permanently into a convent.

The reply was as follows: "The Lady of Bocasse commends herself to her very dear and much redoubted lord. Though debarred by reason of her sex from being a knight, the Lady of Bocasse can be as faithful a vassal and provide as large a company of men-at-arms and of archers as could the late lord,

her dear and honored father. For conventual life she has found she has no vocation. She can better serve her God and her king in the world than out of it. The gates of Bocasse are always open to his majesty; but if other than he want the château, let him come and take it."

Instead of being affronted by this defiant reply, the king chuckled, and said:

"The Lady Yvette has the face of an angel, but the temper of the devil!"

The knight bit his lips and pulled his beard. To be defied by a maid—he, the puissant knight and Lord of Ambricicourt—was past enduring!

The king enjoyed his discomfiture, and inquired half mockingly:

"What sayest thou, Sir Knight, to this maid's challenge?"

"Had I a hundred lance, I should seize the château and make its châtelaine sue for grace."

"I'll furnish thee with a hundred lance, with provisions for a month, on condition that thou promise not to harm the lady in case thou get possession of the castle; neither must thou lay waste to the county of Bocasse."

The knight gladly accepted the terms.

After Lady Yvette had sent back the first message to the king containing her refusal of his offer of a husband, she had returned to the château. On the messenger's second visit, he found her plying the

distaff among the women. As soon as she despatched her second reply, which amounted to a challenge, she ordered her distaff set aside and her tapestry frame put away; then summoning the captain of the guard, she directed him to put the château into a state of defence. A few mornings later, when she arose from her bed to find a goodly company of men-at-arms camped in front of the walls, her first feeling was one of elation. Here was something to keep her thoughts from dwelling too long on her recent double affliction.

The trumpet of the herald told the inhabitants of the château that the besiegers desired to hold a parley. Lady Yvette answered the summons herself, appearing on the wall beside the warden's tower in her flowing robes of white.

The herald saluted the lady, and then cried:

"Open the gates of Bocasse to the envoy of his majesty the King of Navarre!"

"If his majesty be with you, I beg that he approach and receive the homage of his faithful vassal, Yvette de Bocasse!" rang out the clear, bell-like tones of the Maid of Bocasse.

Then another figure rode out from among the company—a tall, commanding figure, whose open visor revealed the features of the handsome Gascon knight. Bowing low over his horse's head, he said:

"His majesty, King Charles of Navarre, has sent me to take possession of Bocasse in his name."

"The first duty of a loyal knight is obedience. Therefore, take possession of the château and also of its châtelaine—if you can!" called out the Maid of Bocasse in mocking tones. Saluting him, she disappeared from the wall.

She went up to one of the turrets, and from an opening watched the preparations for assault. The foe had brought with them no besieging apparatus, no battering rams, nothing save rafts to cross the moat and ladders to scale the walls.

They were three hundred strong (a lance counted from three to five men, generally a knight and two squires); the besieged had a force one-third as large; therefore, the châtelaine had no fear of the result, protected as she was by the strong walls of the castle.

While the enemy were preparing to cross the moat, Lady Yvette called the most skilful of her archers and bade them shoot their arrows in dangerous proximity to certain of the besiegers but to avoid taking life; for Lady Yvette had all a woman's horror of blood-shedding, though she had resolved to defend her inheritance at all hazards.

Doffing her robes of white, and donning a suit of light mail, she again appeared on the wall, and awaiting her opportunity, she drew her bow and sent her light weight arrow straight toward the Gascon knight, striking the lance from his hand.

Glancing up quickly, he caught sight of the tall,

slight figure before she had time to draw back behind the parapet. If the lady were to engage personally in the conflict, it would render the exploit more difficult, on account of his promise to conduct her unharmed to the king with all the honor due to a lady of her high rank.

The assault on the walls soon followed. Lady Yvette had already matured her plans for defence. Even the captain of the guard placed himself under her orders, for all recognized in her the martial spirit of her father. Taking up her position in a watch tower, she directed that the archers range themselves along the wall and shoot at the assailants, each picking out his man. Great caldrons of boiling pitch were smoking over fires; tubs of quicklime stood ready at hand. No sooner were the scaling-ladders in place and the men began swarming up, than arrows began to fly, and burning pitch and quicklime began to pour.

The besiegers had not expected so active or warm a reception. Hastily descending to the ground, they seized their ladders and ran around to a distant part of the wall; but Messire de Bonciel, captain of the guard, as quickly changed his position, and with a few of his men effectually disputed the possession of that part of the wall. Messire d'Ambricicourt soon saw that they were getting the worst of the struggle, for at least a dozen of his men-at-arms were seriously wounded, while twice as many more had suf-

fered more or less from the pitch and quicklime. He sounded the recall, and he and his men retired to seek refreshment.

The skirmish had been short, and having been commenced soon after sunrise, it was now the dinner-hour. The camp attendants had the meal all prepared, and it offered a most welcome diversion after the unsuccessful assault. But they were destined to go dinnerless that day, for no sooner were they seated at table than a shower of all sorts of missiles rained down upon them, thrown from the balisters that had been rigged on top of the walls, causing the enemy to scatter in all directions in their wild rush to get out of the reach of the engines.

By this time Messire d'Ambricicourt arrived at the conclusion that if he were to take Château de Bocasse with his present force, it must be either by strategy or by starving the inhabitants into surrender.

When morning broke next day, the watchers of the château found that the enemy had quietly decamped during the night. Messire de Bonciel shook his head on receiving this information.

"'Tis but a feint," he said.

He redoubled his watch and bade the men-at-arms and archers to sleep by day and to be ready for instant service at night.

Events proved the wisdom of this precaution, for ere a week went by came the alarm in the dead of

night that the château was attacked. The night was of inky blackness, and a brisk wind was blowing, so that the movements of the enemy had neither been seen nor heard until they were already scaling the walls. There ensued a fierce conflict, a hand-to-hand fight. In the darkness and confusion friend was taken for foe and foe for friend. Loud rang the clash of steel and the respective war-cries of the combatants, "Navarre! Navarre!" "Bocasse! Bocasse!" All around the wall the conflict seemed to rage; always in the thickest of the fray was heard the voice of the Gascon knight. Presently the late moon rose. The besiegers, seeing that they outnumbered the garrison nearly three to one, renewed the attack with vigor, and affairs were beginning to look desperate for the besieged.

Lady Yvette had donned her armor and mingled in the fight. Suddenly she came upon the Gascon knight who seemed to have become separated from his followers, for, standing with his back against a tower, he was fighting single-handed five or six assailants.

"Navarre! Navarre!" he cried. "To the rescue!"

But before any had chance to respond, Lady Yvette sprang into the midst of the fighting men, and pointing her sword at the knight's breast, cried: "Yield ye, yield ye, Sir Knight! You are my prisoner!"

"By our Lady, no!" he exclaimed; and springing

forward, he pushed his assailants aside, almost throwing Lady Yvette, and leaped over the parapet on to a scaling-ladder. Quickly descending, he sounded the retreat. The midnight assault had not been a success.

Then followed the slow course of a siege. The château was well victualed; and in very wantonness Lady Yvette caused a truce to be observed while her servitors emerged from the castle gates bearing roasted capons, tubs of wine, and other delicacies for the table of the knight and his associates.

The month allotted him for the conquest of Château de Bocasse was nearly up. Messire d'Ambricicourt resolved on another expedient. He caused his herald to proclaim the fact that if the château did not surrender within twenty-four hours the town of Bocasse would be sacked and laid in ashes.

When this message was delivered to the lady of the castle she clasped her hands, took a few agitated steps, then cried:

"Ah, the poltroon! He hurts me through my people! Send hither Messire de Bonciel."

The Lady Yvette was still pacing the floor of her cabinet when the captain of the garrison entered.

"Hast thou heard?" she exclaimed impetuously. "Ah, the poltroons!"

"*Eh bien*, madame, all is fair in war. No one can justly accuse the puissant Gascon knight of

being a coward. But let us consider how we may make the *coup* to answer our purpose."

"Have you a plan, Messire de Bonciel?" asked Lady Yvette eagerly.

"I have a plan, madame; but its success depends upon communicating with the townspeople," answered the captain of the guard. "Could I but get word with the good people of Bocasse I could arrange a surprise for the knight from Bordeaux."

"Could you not make use of Martin?" asked the lady.

"Hélas! no, madame; he is too heavy in his wits and too vain. He would first wish to impress upon every one, the enemy included, the importance of his mission. I would go myself were I not needed here."

"How would you elude the vigilance of the enemy? They have posted sentries all around the walls."

"I should trust to my wits, madame."

There was an interested listener to this conference, of whom neither the lady nor the captain took any heed. It was the demoiseau Raimond, who was obtaining his *nourriture** at Bocasse, a nephew of Messire de Bonciel. He was a fine manly youth of fifteen awaiting his opportunity to be made a squire. He was devoted to his lovely young mistress, the châtelaine of Bocasse, with whom he was a great

*Chivalric education.

favorite, and who had been giving him a lesson on the lute.

"Pardon, madame; but I will elude the guards, and carry any instructions you may desire to convey to the magistrates of the town."

Lady Yvette and Messire de Bonciel both glanced at the speaker. He had thrown down his lute and stood before them, handsome, eager, confident.

Then Lady Yvette looked inquiringly at the captain of the guard, who stood regarding the boy approvingly.

"It is strange I did not think of thee, Raimond," he said. "How wilt thou pass the enemy?"

"They are few, and are at the front and sides of the castle. At the back where the rocks are, there is no one. They do not think it necessary to watch the back where the rocks descend so steeply."

"But no one can ascend or descend that sheer precipice without cutting steps," said his uncle.

"Not unless they know what I know," replied Raimond. "Lower me in a pannier over the wall, and I will do the rest."

"What wilt thou do?" persisted his uncle.

"Descend by a path that only Martin and I know——"

"If Martin knows, all know," interrupted the captain.

"But no, for I have so threatened him that he dares not speak of it to any living being but me.

He is too afraid of the evil spirits," and Raimond chuckled mischievously.

"Thou'd better look to it that the evil spirits do not harm thee, if thou make sport of them. But I will trust thee. Keep thy eyes and ears open, and repeat word for word what I will tell thee later, for the success of this enterprise depends more on our wits than our strength."

Messire de Bonciel talked for some time longer with Lady Yvette, and when the conference closed her face was radiant with exultant anticipation.

Raimond listened attentively to his uncle's instructions, and as soon as darkness fell was lowered over the wall. He had no difficulty in eluding the vigilance of the sentinels, and was soon in the town. Then he repaired to the house of the chief magistrate and delivered his message.

It was three hours after sunrise the following morning. Not a sign of capitulation was visible from the château. The attacking force was drawn up in martial array, awaiting the signal of assault. At length the signal sounded, spurs were put to horse, and the whole company galloped toward the town of Bocasse. Just outside the unwalled city the town guards were awaiting them, armed with pikes and mallets and battle-axes. They made a brave stand for a time, then broke ranks, turned, and fled into the city, closely followed by the enemy, who charged upon them with lance and battle-

axe. Down the narrow, crooked streets the burgess army ran. Darting hither and thither, the men-at-arms had difficulty in following them, for the streets were full of obstacles purposely placed there to impede the horsemen. Into doorways, under arches, the members of the burgess army dodged, hiding in obscure corners, till the whole town force seemed to have melted mysteriously away; while down from the gabled roofs and windows that overhung the streets came pitch, quicklime, stones, and other missiles, even refuse of an unsavory character.

With vehement imprecations, the men-at-arms clattered down the streets in search of foes to conquer till they came to a blank wall which checked farther progress. Wheeling their horses, they charged against the closed doors of houses, which being of heavy oak, resisted their efforts. Then they sought to retrace their steps to join those of their comrades who had taken to other streets, for they had separated while in pursuit of the townspeople. Those, however, who attempted to retrace their way found the streets closed by mounted men-at-arms from Château Bocasse. Not till then did the knights realize that they had been trapped. When Sir Gaston discovered that they had been led into an ambush, he swung his sword around his head and shouted:

"Navarre! Navarre!"

At the same time he charged into the Bocasse

forces with such impetuosity that he made his way into their midst, expecting his followers to keep close behind him. Suddenly he found himself completely cut off from his supporters and hemmed in on all sides by the maid's men. Then there rode up to the knight a slender mail-clad figure on a white horse, and a clear, ringing voice cried:

"Yield ye, yield ye, Sir Knight, to the Lady of Bocasse!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRISONER OF BOCASSE.

In an instant the Gascon knight comprehended the situation. Cut off from his company, alone amid the enemy, he wisely submitted with good grace to the vicissitudes of fortune. Bowing over the gauntleted hand extended toward him to receive his sword, he murmured:

"Never did knight yield to fairer or braver victor."

The Navarrese who had been lent the Gascon knight by King Charles were allowed to return home without ransom. When from them the king learned of the discomfiture of the Sieur d'Ambricicourt, he chuckled.

"Oft have I heard of the wiles and snares of fair dames, but never has knight been more cunningly trapped. Messire d'Ambricicourt must seek other means of courting if he would win one of the fair maids of Navarre."

It was not surprising that Sir Gaston should feel that he had been made the sport of fortune. It was through no fault of his that the attack upon Château Bocasse had been unsuccessful. If its lord had

been a man whom he might have met in fair field with no favor, then would he have no one but himself to blame for failure. Then, also, would not he, Gaston d'Ambricicourt, the renowned Gascon knight, be the prisoner of a maid; for was it not the express stipulation of Charles le Mauvais that the lady should be unharmed? He had given his word readily enough; he had expected that the maid would remain within the castle. Surely a distaff is more suited to a lady's hand than a lance!

Sir Gaston had been conducted with all courtesy due his rank to the castle, where he was lodged as a guest rather than a captive. The day after his surrender he had requested the captain of the guard to inform him of the amount of his ransom, that he might set about at once to raise it and rejoin his lord at Bordeaux. But Messire de Bonciel said he must first consult with the Lady of Bocasse.

Vague excuses met his repeated requests to have the amount of his ransom settled. In vain the Gascon knight reminded his captors of the importance of his mission and the necessity of a speedy return to Bordeaux.

"'Twere a pity, Sir Knight, for thee to have dallied so long outside a lady's castle; but surely would it now be lacking in knightly courtesy to hasten thy departure when its gates have opened to receive thee," once answered the Maid of Bocasse, a little mockingly.

There was one inmate of Château Bocasse who appreciated the company of Sir Gaston, and that was the damoiseau, Raimond de Brèze. Nearly sixteen, he was well trained in the use of arms and in the manly sports of his time; and being well developed, strong, and active, would have been made a squire before this had not the Lord of Bocasse so suddenly died.

Raimond eagerly questioned Sir Gaston concerning the court at Bordeaux and the new Lord of Aquitaine; for the fame of the Black Prince had reached even the southern kingdom of Navarre, whose king, called Charles le Mauvais, was a man of great ambition and no principle, who espoused the cause of the English or French according to what he could get for himself out of either.

At the time of our story, 1366, France was in the throes of the Hundred Years' War, during which time successive English kings were trying by force of arms to establish the claim of Edward III. and his successors to the French crown. Edward III., King of England, was the father of the Black Prince, who had distinguished himself at the battle of Créci, 1346. So far the English had the best of it, for Edward was supported by Flanders, his wife being the daughter of the Count of Hainault, and also had a loyal Commons to vote him money to secure proper munitions of war; but better than either was his sturdy yeomanry, who bore the brunt of battle and

who formed a well-disciplined force that was accustomed to obey orders. The French king, on the contrary, depended entirely on his nobles and their followers. The people were ignored save in the matter of taxation, in which they had no voice; the poorer the man the greater was the tax in proportion. After the battle of Poitiers, 1356, when King John had been taken prisoner by the Black Prince, some of the fairest provinces of France had been ceded to the English as a part of his ransom; among these was Aquitaine, to which duchy King John renounced all suzerainty. Thereupon Aquitaine was raised to an independent principality in the English interest, and Edward Prince of Wales, known to history as the Black Prince, was made its lord.

Gascony came under the suzerainty of the English prince in spite of the protests of the Gascons at being entirely dissociated from the French crown; for hitherto the English had held their possessions in France as vassals of the French king. The Black Prince further alienated the Gascon lords by bestowing all privileges and preferments on English knights.

In process of time reports of these things came to Béarn, wherein was situated the county of Bocasse, and Raimond was eager to know more of the details; for a young nobleman's career was to be followed only on the battlefield. Many were the conversations held between the knight and the page; and

sometimes the beautiful châtelaine and her women would also be interested listeners, and Lady Yvette would inquire after "the fair Maid of Kent," as the charming consort of the Black Prince was still known, though once a widow and twice a wife.

Often of an afternoon of that fine October weather would the châtelaine and her ladies, squires, and pages sit on the perron, under the shade of the great elm, and listen to the knight's tales of adventure.

As the days passed, the haste of the handsome knight to be gone diminished. Life at Bocasse, though quiet, was very pleasant, made doubly so to Sir Gaston by the presence of a sweet, gracious woman, more gracious because she wished to impress upon the suitor to her domains that its châtelaine also was well worth the winning.

One morning Martin came to the castle and told how for a week past the peasants' fields had been nightly visited and the choicest of their flocks carried off by a bear, which Martin had traced to its den in the mountain.

Then said the Maid of Bocasse:

"Let us go hunt the beast on the morrow, that these poor peasants may not lose their sheep."

So the next morning at daybreak the courtyard was all astir with stamping horses, hallooing grooms, merry pages, and impatient squires. Then the gates were thrown open, the bridge let down, and out the

courtyard, through the vaulted passage under the towers, across the bridge, clattered the horses, eagerly snuffing the bracing morning air. On the two foremost horses rode the captive knight and Lady Yvette, the latter looking radiant in her green hunting robe.

The air was sweet and fresh; the birds warbled and called from tree to tree; the grass sparkled with dewdrops that caught and reflected the rays of the rising sun. Over the green meadows, in swift, exhilarating gallop till the mountainside was reached, they sped; up its steep sides they more cautiously rode, for the path was narrow and treacherous. Then came the discovery of the trail, followed by the sound of the horns, the cry of the dogs, and the delight of pursuit. But bruin was wary. Higher and higher they climbed the mountain, till horse could go no farther, and the hunters were compelled to dismount and proceed on foot. Still the tracks led upward into the regions of snow and ice. Suddenly there came a mighty shout. The great lumbering form of a huge bear was seen swaying from side to side as he tried to outdistance his pursuers. Up and down the jagged slopes that formed the mountain top, over plateaux of ice, the bear led the hunters. On rushed the gallant hounds; up steep ascents, down sudden declivities, across more ice, through deep gorges, trotted the bear.

Lady Yvette had been obliged to drop out of the chase before this; one by one the huntsmen fell be-

hind, until Sir Gaston, Martin, and two other attendants were all that followed the trail. At length, weary but desperate, the bear stopped and turned, facing his pursuers. Back of him and on one side were huge overhanging rocks; on the other side was an abrupt falling away of earth as if washed out by a mountain torrent.

On his thick hind legs stood the bear, a grim figure, threatening enough to daunt the boldest. The dogs rushed at him, but he knocked them to the right and left with his enormous paw, laying two of them dead at his feet. The others, howling with pain and fright, slunk back to the feet of the knight, who stood with his spear poised, waiting for the proper moment to throw it. Just then Martin came up to the knight, and, seeing the wounded dogs, gave a cry so loud that it attracted to him the attention of the bear, who took a few steps forward and caught the unlucky peasant in his deadly embrace.

Martin shrieked with agony and terror. He was helpless in the grasp of the brute, able to move neither of his arms. To launch a spear at the animal without striking the man was impossible, so Sir Gaston flung down his spear, and drawing his dagger from his belt, sprang upon the infuriated animal, striking him in the throat above Martin's head. With a howl of rage and pain, the bear released Martin and struck out at the knight, catching his left arm in his claws. Fast and furious were the thrusts

of the knight's dagger, loud and hideous was the roar of the beast, that echoed and re-echoed through the rocky caverns.

By this time three or four of the rest of the party arrived on the scene and hurried to the aid of the knight.

The bear was now desperate, and fought off his assailants with the courage born of despair. With a final effort the knight rallied his fast failing strength for a spring, and, plunging his knife deep into the bear's neck, cut the jugular vein. Bleeding from many wounds, faint with fast-coming death, the animal fell heavily, bringing the knight down partially beneath his bulky body. Strong hands soon drew Sir Gaston from his dangerous position.

Loud rang the shouts of the huntsmen at the victory over the animal, and great were their astonishment and satisfaction when they came to see its size, for seldom had been killed so large a bear. Sir Gaston was faint from loss of blood, and had to be helped down the crags to where their horses awaited them. They had not ridden far when Lady Yvette saw he was keeping on his horse with difficulty, and no sooner had they passed the gates of the castle than he swayed in his saddle, and would have fallen had she not been at his side and held his unconscious form in her arms till attendants bore him from his horse and up to his chamber.

Nurse Alinore was soon with him, and it was only

her skill in healing and her careful nursing that brought him back to life. Deftly did she cleanse and dress his terrible wounds, applying soothing unguents and administering quieting drinks. But many a day the knight lay upon his bed of pain, as weak and helpless as a child. Hardly day nor night did his grateful and faithful nurse leave his side. To her he owed his life, as she owed hers to him.

When the fever was at its height, often was the name of Yvette upon the sufferer's lips, repeated so yearningly and pleadingly that the good dame's heart was touched. One midnight, when Nurse Alinore had almost given up hope of his recovery, and he called so unceasingly for the lady of the castle, his nurse softly stole from his chamber, made her way to Lady Yvette's room, and waking her nursling, bade her arise, dress quickly, and follow her.

"Is he dying?" asked the young girl, fear clutching at her heart.

"I know not; but come."

Not another word was spoken till they reached the bedside of the sick man. He was restlessly tossing from side to side, moaning, and muttering incoherently:

"Yvette, Yvette, why dost thou defy me? Scale the wall! Look out, look out, you will hit her! Ah, I die and she will not come!"

"Yes, yes," she murmured, and she knelt by his bedside, and nestled his head in her arms, and laid

her cool cheek on his fevered brow. Then his eyes opened, a smile parted his lips, he breathed deeply, and his mutterings and moanings and tossings ceased, and soon he was in a deep slumber, from which he awoke refreshed; and from that time his recovery was sure.

Often would the Lady Yvette have her tapestry frame taken to his room, and she would sit and sing to him, sometimes forgetting to work, while Nurse Alinore looked on approvingly; for who was more worthy of her dear nursling than the puissant knight who risked limb and life not only for renown and glory, but for the lowly who had no other guerdon to give than their grateful thanks?

Thus weeks passed, the knight being slow in regaining his full strength; nor did he regret it, for life was sweet within Château Bocasse, with the sound of the châtelaine's voice in his ears and the sight of her kind eyes and gracious smile. And every day his heart grew more joyous for thinking that it was a love-light that made his lady's eyes so softly bright, quicker heart throbs that caused the color ever to flit in the fair cheeks; and while the cold mists blew over the mountains as if chased by malignant sprites, and the wind whistled down the gorges, and roared and wailed and moaned and shrieked about the turreted castle, all was light and warmth and brightness within.

Then, though it was December, came some soft,

warm days, almost summer days, that tempted the indwellers to sally without the walls; and Nurse Alinore consenting, horses were saddled, and out the gates rode Lady Yvette by the side of Sir Gaston, who was rejoiced to feel once more the spring of his horse under him, but still happier at having the Lady Yvette by his side.

On and on they rode, leaving their train far behind. Then, as if by tacit understanding, the ardor of their steeds abated, and they cantered quietly side by side. Presently the knight leaned toward the lady, and putting his hand on her bridle rein, murmured:

"Ah, madame, if this might but last forever!"

Then did for the first time the eyes of Lady Yvette droop before the glance of man; the soft rich color deepened in her cheeks and the sweet tones faltered as she tried to give an indifferent answer. Closer drew the horses together, the arm of the knight stole around the waist of the lady, his face inclined toward hers, when on came the clatter of hoofs announcing the approach of the attendants. Quickly the space widened between the two lovers. Lady Yvette spoke to her palfrey and off she flew, but the knight kept close behind.

Many conflicting emotions filled the breast of the Lady Yvette as she rode homeward that balmy evening. Her heart thrilled at the memory of those handsome, eloquent eyes that gazed so passionately

into hers, at the thought of the touch of his arm; but she battled against awakening love, for suspicion had made her heart to smart with its stings. The Gascon knight had started out to take Château de Bocasse either with or without its châtelaine; he had proved the fact that he could not take it without its lady, and now he was directing his assaults against the heart of the châtelaine.

For hours she walked the floor of her chamber.

If only she dare yield to the sweet pleadings of her heart! But, no; pride bade her beware the guile and wiles of conquering man. To give up her inheritance was but little compared to giving her heart to an indifferent suitor.

So for days after that of the ride, she was ever surrounded by her maidens, in order that the knight should have no chance to have private word with her. She feared herself, she feared lest her pride melt under the warmth of his wooing, lest she yield to his glance and acknowledge him her lord.

Sir Gaston d'Ambricicourt was not a man to be easily eluded, and when he found that the Lady Yvette kept aloof from him his love but flamed the hotter. She was so pure, so fair, so unapproachable in her maiden dignity, so desirable in her beauty and pride, that he determined to win her, cost what it might.

One night, as they sat in the glow of the great roaring fire that lighted the vast apartment, he picked

up the lady's lute and began to sing to its accompaniment, unmindful of the attendants, keeping his eyes fixed upon the flames, except when he raised them to seek the glance of Lady Yvette.

Thus he sang:

"'I fear to sing too seldom or too long—
I cannot tell if silence be the best,
Or if at all to tune my tender song—
For she denies me pity, hope, and rest.
Yet in my lay I might some note awake
To please her ear more than all lays before,
Though thus she seems a cruel joy to take
That I should slowly suffer evermore.

"'She keeps me lingering thus in endless doubt,
And, as she pleases, holds me in her chain;
Grant she no smile—I can adore without;
And thus she knows and I reproach in vain!
I am content to wait my chances even now,
If she will but one ray of hope allow.'"*

"Charming!" murmured the lady when he finished, "but the hour is late," and with a stately inclination of her head she swept from the room, followed by her waiting-women.

Then Sir Gaston sought the intervention of Nurse Alinore, and begged her to intercede in his behalf. Joyfully the fond nurse undertook the mission. But Lady Yvette was provokingly gay. She laughed at her old nurse, and told her that a maiden's heart was not always to be had for the asking.

* From a *chanson* of Thibault of Champagne.

"But, *ma mie*, is it not that the knight has proven himself worthy? Did he not save the life of thy old nurse, and does he not deserve his reward?"

"So thou thinkest, because he drove a pack of peasants out of the castle as a dog scatters a flock of sheep, that he should receive as guerdon the domain of Bocasse? Puissant knights would be plenty as flies in summer if such guerdons awaited their valiant exploits."

"But, demoiselle, did he not also save the life of poor Martin?"

"Ah, thou wouldst have me give myself and inheritance to one who saved the life of a churl that came near being the death of my good nurse!" and the young girl threw her arms around her faithful friend's neck, and stopped further words with kisses.

Again and again Nurse Alinore reverted to the subject, but she was met with gay raillery or contemptuous indifference, sometimes even with anger; though all the while the young maid's heart leaped at the sound of the knight's footsteps, and her heart longed for the glance of his eyes. One evening she was walking alone on the west wall, about sunset, and Sir Gaston, chancing to see her, quickly followed. As she heard his footsteps, she cast a laughing glance over her shoulder, a challenging glance, then ran, fleet as a deer, along the parapet. Swift of foot, light of body, strong of breath, she would have outrun him, but her long robe wound itself around

her feet, and before she could disentangle it he was by her side, had seized her in his arms as if to prevent her from falling, and held her to his wildly beating heart.

"*Chérie! Bien aimée!*" he murmured; "at last thou art mine!" and he held her fair face from him and looked down into her eyes.

Lady Yvette trembled, and her eyes fell beneath his gaze; his lips approached hers; in another instant she would have yielded herself to him had not the memory of that night when his head lay within her arms and her cheek rested upon his brow flashed between her eyes and his, and at the thought of it the assurance of his wooing angered her. She was not the maid to be lightly won and lightly cherished.

She withdrew from his encircling arms, and stood aloof, with her dainty chin slightly raised, and her lids half lowered, and said with mocking lips:

"My lord thinks Château Bocasse well worth the simulation of a lover's ardor. But he will find the heart of the châtelaine as well fortified as were the walls of the château!" and with a sweeping courtesy she left him there; while he pulled at his beard in his vexation.

And Sir Gaston d'Ambricicourt swore lustily. Was he always to be made ridiculous and contemptible by a maid, who, as had said the King of Navarre, "had the face of a saint and the temper of a devil"?

So he sent to the captain of the guard, craving an interview. And when it was granted, he demanded to know the amount of his ransom, asking permission to depart at once for Bordeaux in quest of it.

"Fair Sir Knight, you are at liberty to go and come as you list: for your ransom has long since been paid; so says the Lady of Bocasse."

"How so?" demanded the knight.

"In the lives of Dame Alinore and Martin," replied the captain of the guard.

"Does madame value the life of a Gascon knight no higher than that of an old woman and a fool of a peasant?"

And Sir Gaston d'Ambricicourt rode out the gates of Château Bocasse, heartsore, angry, and humiliated; while the lady of the castle watched him depart as best she might through the tears that obscured her sight and reddened her eyes.

CHAPTER V.

SIR BERTRAND DU GUESCLIN.

Now there lived in France at this time a Breton knight called Bertrand du Guesclin. This gentleman had so distinguished himself in the Brittany war of succession between the counts of Montford and Blois as to have attracted the favorable notice of the French king. His birth was obscure, his father being a simple knight, having neither wealth nor renown. Nor was Sir Bertrand handsome or learned, having made his way by force of gallantry and skill at arms, as well as that inherent power in great leaders of being able to inspire large bodies of men with something of their own will and spirit, after having excited their admiration and won their confidence by deeds of valor and acts of heroism.

The renown of this knight had spread far and wide. Even the exploits of the Black Prince seemed to have been forgotten in the talk and stir of some of those of Sir Bertrand, especially his exploit of seizing the Captal de Buch from the midst of his own army, aided only by thirty of his followers. Not only did the success of this daring feat add

greatly to the renown of the Breton knight, but it gained him substantial reward, for Charles V., then king of France, bestowed upon him, in recognition of this service, the princely domain of the county of Longueville. Also this exploit and several others caused the Black Prince to look closely lest the laurels be snatched from his brow to adorn that of the Breton knight. Nor were his fears lessened when he learned of Sir Bertrand's brilliant successes in Spain, whither he had led the Free Companies that had been devastating France since the Treaty of Brittany, which had given King John his liberty, denuded France of some of her fairest provinces, and stopped for a time the war between France and England.

In the fourteenth century France had no standing army. The barons and vassals, who owed the king military service, were bound to serve him from but one to three months at a time; consequently they could not be depended upon for long campaigns, and the king was obliged to resort to the employment of mercenaries, whom he paid so long as he had use for them. When discharged from the king's service, unless they were hired by another master, they formed companies under some able leader and preyed upon the country at large. These men were of all ranks and all nationalities,—English, Brabanters, Normans, Picards, Gascons, and Flemings. They pillaged rich and poor alike, and were known as

brigands, taking their name from the *brigandine*, a shirt of mail consisting of small scales sewed upon a shirt of buckram, which was worn by ordinary foot soldiers. This word has since become synonymous with robber or highwayman, because of the depredations of these freebooters. Men of high birth did not scruple to command them. These self-styled "Free Companies" numbered thirty thousand men, and in times of peace extorted blackmail from every province in France. King Charles summoned the Breton knight to court and asked him if he would not rid the kingdom of this incubus. This Sir Bertrand agreed to do, and accordingly, making friends with the captains by promising them a free pardon and a hundred thousand golden crowns as soon as they should have crossed the frontier, and also the prospect of unlimited plunder, he led the Free Companies into Spain. That country was distracted by civil war. Don Pedro the Cruel, by his oppression, had driven his subjects into rebellion. Henry of Transtamare, his natural brother, led the revolt, and appealed to the French for assistance. This the French king was willing to render for two reasons: first, because it would relieve him of the Free Companies, and also because Don Pedro had murdered his wife, who was a sister of Charles V. of France.

Aided by his French ally and the Free Companies, Don Henry succeeded in deposing Don Pedro and putting him to flight. Thereupon Don Pedro had

appealed to the Black Prince for succor to enable him to recover his own, going to Aquitaine to plead his cause in person. Accompanied by a large retinue of knights and squires, the Black Prince went to Bayonne to receive his royal visitor and suppliant, who told him that in his extremity he had come for succor "to honor, prowess, and complaisance; to virtue, the flower of chivalry; to the sword of the valiant to which every one resorts; to him who by right bears the dominion, the key, and the mastery of all knights' prowess, hardihood, largess, and courtesy!" This pretty bit of flattery naturally made the prince feel very amiably disposed toward Don Pedro.

The Spanish king was most munificent in the bestowal of magnificent presents and in promises of princely rewards. To the Princess of Wales he sent a table made of finely wrought gold inlaid with precious stones, among the latter being a carbuncle of such great size and dazzling lustre that, in the exuberant speech of the time, "it restored to night the light of the sun."

The fair princess received the gift with indifference; she knew the bauble would cost her husband much more than its value; besides, she had no mind to aid so profligate a king, and one who had murdered his own wife.

"It is a beautiful present," she said when she saw it, "but it will cost us dear."

The words of the princess were prophetic, for the expedition ultimately cost her husband's life and the loss of all the English possessions in France, save Bordeaux and Calais, until Henry V. regained them for a time at a great expenditure of time, life, and money.

The lords of Aquitaine were very ready for any fresh enterprise that promised glory and gold, but they distrusted the Spanish king's lavish promises.

"Who is to pay the wages of our men?" they asked. "If it were in the interest of our dear lord, your father, and of yourself, or for your honor or your courtesy, we would not speak of it before doing it."

The Black Prince turned to Don Pedro, who was present, for by this time they had arrived at Bordeaux, and said:

"Sir King, you hear what our people say; it becomes you to answer them, as it is your business."

"My dear cousin," replied the king, "so far as the money and the treasure I have with me will extend, which are not by thirty times as much as I have at home, I will give and divide them among your people."

"You say well," rejoined the prince, "for the balance, I will make my debt to them and lend you all you may need until we are in Castile."

"By my head," exclaimed the king, "you do me great favor and great courtesy!"

Thus it was that the Black Prince had sent Sir

Gaston to the King of Navarre for permission to cross his kingdom on his way to Spain.

Charles le Mauvais had not waited for the Gascon knight to recover his liberty in order to send his answer to Edward Prince of Wales and Aquitaine. The reply, however, had been far from satisfactory, for while full of fair seemings, it definitely promised nothing. Therefore, the Black Prince sent another messenger to Charles le Mauvais, calling upon him to fulfil the obligations imposed by the last treaty between them, else would he visit Navarre as an enemy instead of a friend.

Charles le Mauvais disclaimed any intention of evading the conditions of said treaty, and declared he had already recalled from Spain the Navarrese who had gone to the aid of Don Enriquez.

That the recall of the Navarrese had been so timed as to meet a detachment of the Black Prince at Roland's Pass may have been an accident, but it certainly looks like one of those little schemes by which Charles le Mauvais delighted to harass his neighbors, without involving himself too deeply. Still, it may have been the garrulity that is inspired by good comradeship that induced the messenger of Charles le Mauvais to reveal the fact to the French allies and Spanish supporters of Don Enriquez that the Prince of Wales was about to send an army across the Pyrenees, with which he expected to reinstate Don Pedro on the throne of Leon and Castile,

and that the first detachment would cross the famous Pass of Roncesvalles on a certain day.

However, it is not the business of a chronicler always to give reasons, but rather to relate facts; and the facts in this case are that when the detachment of the army of the Black Prince, under the command of Sir Gaston d'Ambricicourt, late prisoner of Bocasse, attempted to cross the Pyrenees in advance of the main army, according to instructions, he found that the god of war, like the little god of love, acts in a manner that is both perverse and devious.

Sir Gaston had left Bocasse a much disappointed man, and had made his way back to Bordeaux, settled, as he supposed, in the conviction that Navarre was no place for him and should see him no more.

The Lady of Bocasse was too hospitable a châtelaine to permit a guest to ride away unattended, and had requested Messire de Bonciel to take some men-at-arms and escort Sir Gaston back to Bordeaux. Raimond had begged to be allowed to go, and when on the road entreated his uncle so strongly to be permitted to become the squire of Sir Gaston, who had promised to receive him in his suite if he could gain the consent of his lady and his uncle, that Messire de Bonciel gave a conditional consent. Should madame approve, he might remain; otherwise he was to return at once; therefore, when the captain of the guard returned to Bocasse, after escorting the late

prisoner to Bordeaux, Raimond was not of his company.

Lady Yvette was secretly much pleased that all communication with the handsome knight was not entirely to be shut off; yet she pretended to some annoyance that one of her pages should wish to quit her service. Messire de Bonciel represented to her that there was no opportunity for advancement of fortune in Bocasse just then; that Raimond was an aspiring youth, though a faithful and loyal one, and would return immediately when his lady signified such a wish. Then Lady Yvette consented to let him remain with the Gascon knight until he were ready to return of his own will.

In spite of Sir Gaston's intention of shaking forever the dust of Navarre from his feet, the day after his return to Bordeaux he found himself on the way back to Navarre with Raimond riding behind him in company with the squires, who carried their lord's lance, shield, and helmet. It took several days to cross Béarn and to reach the Pyrenees; then they were obliged to halt a day or two while awaiting the arrival of the guides that Charles le Mauvais had promised to furnish to conduct the company through the Pass at Roncesvalles, made famous by the defeat and death of Roland during the time of Charlemagne.

It was February. The days had been as warm and balmy as a typical Indian summer; but when Sir Gaston, his company, and guides began ascending

the lower ridge of the Pyrenees, the weather suddenly changed, the sun was obscured by mist, and the mist turned to snow, so that the horses and their riders became as animated statues, so quickly did the damp, clinging snow envelop them.

Steeper and higher grew the mountain slopes, sheerer and more jagged rose the precipices, blacker yawned the gorges. On they marched over paths that seemed like the beds of dried-up mountain torrents; up the wearisome ascent toiled the mountain ponies, heavily laden with the weight of the mail-clad men-at-arms, and constantly slipping on the treacherous mountain paths.

They had entered the gorge early in the morning; two hours after noon, cold, weary, and hungry, they came to a place where they decided to camp for the night, as the short day was almost over in the gloom of the mountain fastnesses.

The spot they had selected was a circus-like interior, scooped out, as it were, from a group of stony and precipitous mountains whose peaks were crowned with perpetual snow. It seemed as if it might have been the bed of some upland lake, fed at one time by the rushing torrent that had riven its way through the mountains, its outlet being at the other end from where the Gascon knight and his company had entered.

On one side were peaks of varying heights; on the other rose abruptly frowning granite cliffs that

towered perpendicularly over a thousand feet above their heads.

The ponies were tethered near the entrance of the gorge by which they had entered the amphitheatre; fires were lighted at the foot of the cliffs, their flames playing mad pranks on the grim and sombre fronts. Supper was over. The men lay about the fires, sleepy and weary after their laborious ascent.

Suddenly they were startled by a thousand yells, and down into the amphitheatre, both by the gorge at the farther end and by the smaller hills opposite the frowning cliffs, swarmed a thousand men.

Quickly getting into his armor, Sir Gaston called for the Basque peasants who had been their guides, but they had disappeared. The English were outnumbered two to one, and were crowded back against the cliffs by the Spanish and Navarrese troops. Desperately they fought, but closer and harder pressed the enemy. Those in front bore the brunt of the attack, and as they were hewn down, those in the rear took their places to suffer a like fate.

It was a terrible *mêlée*. The enemy had every advantage—that of a surprise, of space, of knowledge of the ground, and of numbers. The struggle, though furious, was brief; for suddenly there rolled down from the mountain tops a Pyrenean fog that engulfed the combatants almost like the heaving waves of the ocean. The clash of conflict was

dulled, the din of voices was muffled, and soon silence as well as the mist settled upon the struggling men at the foot of the towering cliffs.

Night came, and the fog lifted; the camp fires that threw fantastic shadows over the gray, grim walls were now surrounded by Spanish and Navarrese men-at-arms instead of English, who lay huddled near the entrance by which they had entered, guarded by a company of armed Spaniards, who awaited impatiently the time when the watch would be changed, for they had travelled far, fought hard, and their eyes were heavy with sleep. They had no fear of the escape of the English and Gascon prisoners, for many were wounded, the way was hazardous, bears and wolves abounded, and it was a journey never made by night. So when their eyes closed, and their heads nodded, they did not fight off the seductions of sleep, as they would have done had the situation been less secure, or had they not known that there were sentinels to watch.

The moon shone fitfully over the slender pines that dotted the mountain peaks, which stood out, dark and shadowy, under her shifting gleams as she peered from her wrappings of moving, misty clouds. Over the mountain tops drifted great masses of fog, driven before the mighty winds that shrieked and moaned and hissed like malignant sprites, dashing down into the great stone basin as if it sought to shift the mountain of rock as it did the mist.

The wounded, the dying, and the dead lay together in the gorge. Sir Gaston had been unharmed, and now in the dead of night watched and pondered over the fate that awaited him, while all else slept save the sentinels and those of his brave companions who were too sorely smitten to lose sense of pain in sleep even for one brief moment.

The prospect was dark. Sir Gaston had overheard the councils of the leaders, who took no heed to conceal their designs. It was decided to put the prisoners to death instead of holding them for ransom. There were two reasons for this: first, that there should be none left to tell of the ambush in case Don Pedro should be re-established on the Castilian throne; second, the charge of so many prisoners would impede their movements, as the Spaniards wished to return to the Spanish side of the Pyrenees as speedily as possible; while the Navarrese, who were bidden report to Charles le Mauvais within two days, would find the English prisoners decidedly in the way, as their presence would be embarrassing to account for, now that the Navarrese king had openly declared himself on the side of Don Pedro.

While Sir Gaston was pondering over the disadvantages of the situation, there occurred a most singular thing. First, strains of music as of angels' chants floated downward from the heavens above. Glancing upward, Sir Gaston beheld the tall white figure of a spirit form poised lightly on a snow-cov-



"Sir Gaston Beheld the Tall Figure of a Spirit Form Poised Lightly on a Projecting Crag Above Him."

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ered projecting crag far above him. Myriads of spirits seemed circling about the one that stood out more distinctly than the others. The cloudlike apparitions appeared and disappeared, ascended and descended, advanced and retreated, sometimes hovering in the air directly overhead, sometimes crowding about the single figure poised on the overhanging crag, which seemed to be with one hand beckoning to those who lay at the bottom of the cliffs, while with the other pointed upward and beyond.

"*Les Blanquettes! Les Blanquettes!*" muttered the sentinels, crossing themselves and falling upon their knees, their lips moving in half audible prayer.

Louder and louder blew the wind, so that the voices of the spirits were stilled; quicker and quicker swayed the forms that at times appeared to be mere creatures of the mists, as they wreathed in and out amid the peaks, faster flew the mists before the north wind; while the moon looked out serenely from its cover of fleecy wrappings, throwing a silver flood on clouds and phantoms.

The roar of the wind became almost deafening; the cold was intense. Spellbound, Sir Gaston gazed upward, fascinated by the weird sight which he, too, believed to be supernatural. Suddenly he felt his arm seized from behind. Turning, he saw Raimond.

"Follow quickly, Sir Gaston!" shrieked the boy, and though the words were fairly shot into Sir Gas-

ton's ear, he scarcely caught their meaning on account of the howling, hissing wind.

"They have come to the rescue!" screamed the page. Then stooping, he wakened the sleeping prisoners. Close behind him was Martin, who, taking up a wounded man, put him on his back and made for the narrow gorge by which Sir Gaston and his company had entered the amphitheatre hours before. Some of the unwounded prisoners followed his example. They made their way past the awe-struck sentinels, who could hear nothing on account of the wind, and saw nothing because of their lowered eyes, which they dared not raise on account of the white spirits above. The remainder of the guard slept, hearing and seeing nothing also, for they never dreamed that a rescue or an escape would be attempted at night.

Stealthily crept the escaping prisoners behind the backs of the sentinels, who were too engrossed with their prayers to give thought to their charges. They prayed and quaked and groaned. This supernatural visitation foreboded dire calamity. The hand of the Lord was against them; the white spirits had come to warn them to withdraw from the enterprise before too late.

When dawn came, and the watch was changed, the sentinels had a blood-curdling tale to unfold concerning the white spirits who had come from above and had borne the prisoners away, after touching the

lips of the sentinels with their fingers and sealing them to silence. And though many marvelled, none dared question, as it is known that the *blanquettes* are exceedingly jealous of their reputation and sorely punish all unbelievers.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RESCUE.

As the Lady Yvette watched the Gascon knight ride away in the mists of that February morning, she felt as though the sun of her life had also been ingulfed in the fog that swallowed his form. She tried to comfort herself with the thought that she had upheld the dignity of the house of Bocasse by demonstrating that neither the fortress of the castle nor of its lady's heart would yield at the first attack. But where there was none to commend her independence, and the days passed on, and her heart grew heavier with loneliness and longing, the satisfaction received from that sense of independence waned.

No longer was she the light-hearted girl of a few months since, for in that short time grief and love had entered her life. No longer did she canter free of care, gay of spirit, over the hills and valleys. No more did she follow the hounds or fly the hawks. Riding and hunting companions were gone. Death had robbed her of a dearly loved father; pride, of a handsome, gallant lover. The embroidery frame

wearied her with its countless stitches; Nurse Alinore cared for the sick; the officers of the household were too well inducted in the conduct of their various duties to need supervision; since the departure of Sir Gaston her lute had remained unstrung.

In vain Nurse Alinore tried to arouse her from her state of depression; in vain her women sought to divert her with their gossip, their tales, and their songs. Lady Yvette turned impatiently from them all. Often would she go abroad in company with her dogs, which did not pester her with talk, or gallop over the fields, virtually alone, for she bade her attendants keep far in the rear. But times were troublous. Free Companies were constantly passing on their way across the Pyrenees. Nurse Alinore scolded, warned, and entreated, presaging all sorts of dire calamities did Lady Yvette persist in her foolishness in going far afield without proper escort. Captain Bonciel respectfully remonstrated with the lady of the castle, depicting the dangers of such proceedings so vividly that at length Lady Yvette reluctantly promised to keep near the castle and never leave its walls without suitable protection.

"Oh, that I were a knight instead of a maid!" she exclaimed one day, after having given this promise. "To sew, to brew, to sing—these are the vocations of a maid. Oh, I shall die from very weariness!"

"Maids have much to learn to fit them for wives

and mothers. That knowledge gained, then should they marry," answered the good Nurse Alinore.

"But if there should be none to marry?" asked Lady Yvette.

"Then may she enter a nunnery."

"Wouldst thou have me leave the world and thee, good nurse?" asked the young girl, putting her arm about the waist of the older woman and nestling her cheek against hers.

"Better that than discontent, *chérie.* Rather, however, would I have thee rear children and do a woman's duty in the world."

"Can one have a husband for the asking?"

"Sometimes for the taking, little one."

Lady Yvette walked away and did not answer.

"Already hast thou despatched one far from thee who would have cured thy idleness and filled thy empty heart."

Yvette turned and faced her nurse, saying with heightened color:

"My dear nurse, wouldst thou have me bestow my hand as a mere appendage with my domain? Am I so ill-favored that I may not hope to win a lover for myself and not for my estate?"

"The heart of a maid is hard, the sight of her eyes is short, the knowledge of her good is small. Never again will so valiant a knight set foot within Bocasse; never again will the knight himself seek welcome from the castle."

With these words Nurse Alinore left Lady Yvette —words that brought no comfort and increased her longing.

Would she indeed never see him again? Yvette had not thought of that. She was waiting until he should seek her once more. Surely if he loved her he would not be so easily repulsed. How empty life threatened to be without him!

She went out upon the walls and slowly paced along their height. It was here they had met so often and discoursed of many things; it was here that he had held her in his arms for one brief, blissful moment. Oh, that she might bring him back! Surely the broad domain of Bocasse had not been the only attraction! At that moment there came the full, long note of a horn. She started. The blood rushed to her heart.

"A visitor!" she breathed. Had he come in answer to her longing? She waited impatiently to be summoned to receive the guest. But moments passed and no attendant appeared. Unable to restrain her impatience longer, she went down into the reception hall, not even acknowledging to herself whom she hoped to see. There she found a *jongleur*, who besought her hospitality. He was a dainty youth garbed in blue and yellow silk; his short blue breeches reached but half-way down his thighs, the rest of his legs being covered with tight silken hose, one of blue, the other yellow; his long

embroidered pointed shoes were caught at the tips by silver chains to his knees, probably to prevent him from stumbling over his own toes. His coat was also blue and yellow; on his head he wore a hood of blue silk, covered with figures of fantastic design and fastened under the chin by a jewelled button. From under the hood was seen the long fair hair, cut short across the forehead in the fashion of a man-at-arms, though he were but a man of love and song.

As it was already ten o'clock, the dinner hour at the close of the fourteenth century, the newcomer was at once invited to table, receiving a seat near the châtelaine, who, in spite of her disappointment, was well pleased with the minstrel's visit, as was also the rest of the household, as offering diversion in the routine of castle life. *Jongleurs* were always welcome guests, not only on account of their entertaining powers, but because they were a sort of peripatetic newspaper. They travelled from court to court, from town to town, and from château to château; and being privileged guests, their opportunity for gathering information was considerable, and their reports, therefore, were both varied and entertaining.

After dinner the *jongleur* was invited into my lady's boudoir to entertain her and her maidens for a brief time prior to his performance in the great hall for the benefit of the assembled household.

The singer tuned his guitar, and after thrumming

a few notes, began a long, rambling recitation. At first Lady Yvette did not catch its drift, but suddenly she started, and then gazed intently into the face of the singer.

He was reciting an eulogy of deeds of war, and telling how the English, Navarrese, and Spanish were about to meet in Roland's Pass, and as all the men were doughty, there was sure to be a pretty fight; but that the English would fall despite the valiant efforts of the knight of Ambricicourt, who was in command of the English company, as he and his companions would be entrapped like a wolf in its lair, as all egress from the pass would be cut off. "'Twere a pity, too, that such a gallant knight should meet his death thus; rather should he find it on the field of glory 'mid the shock of battle, the clash of arms, and the shouts of victory."

Then the Lady Yvette interrupted him and bade him speak quickly and briefly and tell her in plain, simple words what he meant.

The *jongleur* disclaimed meaning anything specially important, but told how at his last visit, which was at a castle where lodged for the night his majesty, King Charles of Navarre, he had heard rumors and gossip which had suggested his tale.

King Charles and his convives had been drinking long and deep; and as the hours passed and the number of the cups increased, their speech began to flow as freely as the wine, and the *jongleur* had

learned that though the King of Navarre openly espoused the cause of the Black Prince and Don Pedro his inclination was toward Prince Henry of Transtamare. If the English fell in the way of the Spanish and Navarrese, and the English were surprised and cut down, though Charles le Mauvais might be suspected of conniving at the act, nothing could be proved against him.

As soon as the *jongleur* had finished his explanation, Lady Yvette sent for Messire de Bonciel to consult with him.

"Messire," she said, after relating to him briefly what she had learned from the *jongleur*, "the life of your nephew is in danger. We must rescue him. Also should the treacherous designs of the Navarrese be foiled, if only for the honor of Navarre."

Never a word did she breathe concerning Sir Gaston d'Ambricicourt, though Messire de Bonciel was not slow in divining that it was not only the safety of his nephew and the honor of Navarre of which the young châtelaine was thinking.

All the languor, all the discontent, all the weariness dropped from Lady Yvette like a loosened mantle. Her lover was in danger. He must be succored. Then would he not find her disdainful; then could she afford to discard her semblance of pride and show that she was worth loving for her own sake alone.

Within a few moments orders were given, horses

were saddled, and men armed. It was yet day when Messire de Bonciel, with the Lady of Bocasse at his side, rode out the castle gates, followed by a goodly company of men-at-arms. Putting spurs to horse, they rode hard and fast. Daylight waned, but the moon shone out clear and full over the plains.

"Shall we arrive in time?" asked the lady, anxiously, as their horses slackened their gait at the bottom of the foothills.

"In truth, I hope so, madame," was the reply. He was thinking of the dangerous journey up that narrow path in the dark, where a misstep would be attended by fatal results.

On they rode. It was nearly midnight when suddenly Lady Yvette's horse shied and stopped, for just before him stood a figure, and the night air rang with the cry of—

"Bocasse! Bocasse!"

It was this very day that Sir Gaston and his company were encamped in the fateful glen of Gavarnie, unconscious of the danger so close at hand. When the attack had come Raimond had at first joined in the fray, or, at least, tried to do so; but he was crowded back against the cliffs by the larger and stronger men-at-arms, who pushed their way to the front. He soon perceived that the Spanish and Navarrese largely outnumbered them, and that the condition of his comrades was desperate. Oh, if his uncle were only there to aid the English! It would

take hours on the fleetest pony to go to Bocasse, and hours to return. Then the fog settled down over the combatants, and the strife ceased. The English were conquered. It might not be too late for a rescue. It was not yet nightfall out of the glen; he could reach Bocasse before morning, and in three hours after sunrise the rescue party could arrive. But suppose they should have departed with their prisoners before then! At all events it was worth the trial. So he found his way out of the glen, but could not get a pony without running great risk of detection, and was obliged to make his way down the mountainside on foot, stumbling and falling in the dark recesses of the gloomy forest. It was already night when he reached the plain. Miles lay between him and Bocasse, and his feet were sore and his legs were heavy with fatigue. He had gone but a mile or two farther when he heard the clatter of horses' feet. He hid himself in a growth of underbrush till the party should pass by. The moon was shining clearly on the plains, though obscured by the mountain mists above, and what was his delight and surprise to behold the banner of Bocasse and to see his uncle, Messire de Bonciel, and, riding by his side, the Lady of Bocasse, enveloped in her long mantle of white fur.

Giving the cry "Bocasse! Bocasse!" he sprang before their horses, causing Lady Yvette's steed to shy, as we have already seen. Their surprise was

even greater than his had been. He told his tale quickly. An extra pony was given him, for extra horses were brought along in case they should be needed, and he proceeded to lead the way to the glen of Gavarnie. Within the forest all was darkness, gloom, and stillness, except for the cry of the wolves and the screeching of the owls. No moonlight penetrated the sombre depths; the gorges yawned with sable blackness, while the precipitous heights before them seemed impassable. In vain Messire de Bonciel urged Lady Yvette to remain at the foot of the mountain with an attendant or two, while he went upward to the rescue of the English.

Lady Yvette laughed at his fears.

"*En avant!*" was all she said.

Pine torches dipped in pitch were lighted, and this strange gnome-like procession wound its tortuous way up the mountainside until it reached a place where two paths diverged. Here Lady Yvette stopped, and here she developed her plan for the rescue of the Gascon knight and his company. She bade the captain of the guard take one path with the greater part of the men, while she, accompanied by a half-dozen men-at-arms, would take the higher road. In spite of Messire de Bonciel's respectful remonstrances, she insisted on having her will, and made her way upward on foot over the slippery path by the shifting light of the moon, which became clearer as the vegetation grew scantier.

Lady Yvette had hunted too often on the mountains not to be familiar with them. And so in the dead of night, preceded and followed by three men, each bearing a blazing torch to keep away the wolves, she climbed one of the lower peaks that overlook the circus of Gavarnie, wherein the English army lay trapped like a beast in its den. Well she knew the superstitious fears of the Navarrese and Spanish —indeed, she shared them herself—and her heart beat loud and fast with apprehension at her audacity in attempting to personate one of the white spirits in whom every Navarrese firmly believed. So she chanted a prayer clear and loud to frighten off all evil spirits, bidding her companions join her with all their strength of voice.

And it was this hymn that had floated downward to the sentinels and made them gaze upward in fearsome awe at the tall, slender figure poised so lightly on the projecting crag. Fortunately for her plans, the wind had not arisen until after her appearance; and as she had anticipated, the sentinels were made dumb with fright at so uncanny a sight.

At the same time Messire de Bonciel made his entrance into the arena, and succeeded in effecting a rescue without an encounter with the Spanish and Navarrese. As has already been seen, the stratagem was successful. All escaped, even the wounded men, the latter being put upon mountain ponies,

which were carefully led down the steep descent to the plains below.

Recognizing Messire de Bonciel, Sir Gaston eagerly inquired how he had heard of their plight and how so bold a plan of rescue had been conceived. And when Messire de Bonciel told him he had but executed the commands of Lady Yvette, and described her perilous midnight climb up the mountainside, the Gascon knight bowed his head in reverie, while a great joy filled his heart, for surely it must have been love that inspired the Maid of Bocasse with so bold and cunning a plan, the execution of which had been so successful.

Then he begged to be conducted to the Lady Yvette, that he might return thanks and render homage to a lady so brave, so true, so noble.

But she could not be found. Having accomplished her object, she had ridden fast back to the château, whither the wounded love and pride of the Gascon knight forbade him follow her.

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE COURT OF BORDEAUX.

BORDEAUX was alert with expectancy. The war in Spain, as was then believed, had ended successfully for Don Pedro, thanks to his English allies; and Don Pedro, surnamed the Cruel, on account of his atrocities, was again seated on the throne of Leon and Castile.

The Black Prince and his army were hourly expected to make a triumphant entry into Bordeaux. The Abbey of St. Andrew's, where the English prince had so often held court and where he had entertained his illustrious captive, King John of France, was the scene of the busiest preparation. The beautiful Princess of Wales and Lady of Aquitaine was eagerly awaiting her lord's home-coming, for she dearly loved her handsome, noble, and chivalric husband, the Black Prince.

Over the ridge of a wooded hill appeared the advance guard of the returning army. Shield and helmet glittered in the bright morning sunlight, and horse and rider breathed with satisfaction the crisp air as they descended the wooded hillside that led to

the plains below. Beyond glistened the yellow Garônne, and beyond the river, golden in the sunlight, rose a goodly array of fretted Gothic steeples high above the peaked roofs of the dwellings.

The country round about was desolate and bare. Here and there in the almost barren fields were peasants digging in the sunburnt clods; a witch of an old woman was tending a solitary cow, probably the most valuable possession of the family; a single shepherd herded a few sheep, long in the legs, low in flesh, and dirty in fleece. The devastating hand of war had been laid heavily on all the surrounding country; but at the same time the revels at St. Andrew's must be continued, and the reputation of the Black Prince for open-handedness must be sustained, though the peasant drop in his tracks like an overdriven beast of burden to pay for it all. In those days the poorer the subject, the higher in proportion the tax, for privileges he did not receive, for exemptions which he did not enjoy. The peasants lived on sufferance of the *noblesse* and were made to pay dearly for the concession. Though the peasantry and burgess of Bordeaux and its neighborhood hailed with exultant acclamations the arrival of the conqueror, his home-coming was but the precursor of a new tax—a hearth tax—a burden put upon the provinces recently dismembered from the French kingdom, a tax on Frenchmen to pay English soldiers to fight a Spanish prince's battles.

Don Pedro had failed to keep his promise in regard to the reward of the English Companies who had reinstated him on the throne of Castile and Leon, therefore the Black Prince was much embarrassed; for the leaders of the Free Companies were urgent for their pay, saying that if it were not soon forthcoming they would no longer be able to prevent their men from committing depredations upon the surrounding country.

The princely revenues accruing from Wales were always anticipated by the extravagant, open-handed prince, while the income derived from Aquitaine was insufficient to maintain the sumptuous court at Bordeaux and also pay the expenses of foreign warfare. Money must be raised, so the Black Prince revived an ancient tax called *le fouage*, a tax that laid tribute on the fire that burned in every wretched hut of the poverty-stricken population of the Landes, on every fire that cooked the scanty meals of the shepherds, on every fire that warmed the châteaux of the impoverished Gascon nobles.

Yet was the Black Prince jubilant, though he returned broken in health from a disease contracted in the enervating climate on the other side of the Pyrenees during the seasons of the heavy heats. The dreaded Bertrand du Guesclin, abandoned by most of the Free Companies who owed allegiance to the Black Prince and military service, when he had need of it, had been left with an army of but

fifteen hundred men against one of twenty-seven thousand of the Black Prince. Henry of Transtamare, at the head of a large force of undisciplined and inexperienced men, despite the entreaties of Sir Bertrand, had given battle to the English prince. The defeat of Navarette was the result, when the Breton knight had been taken prisoner. Therefore, though the English prince returned to Aquitaine broken in health and depleted in pocket, he had the proud satisfaction of having in his train as prisoner the man who was contesting his honors as the most puissant knight of the age.

At that time the Black Prince was in the prime of his manhood, being but little past thirty-five years of age, and in the height of his glory, having already proven himself a successful general, munificent prince, generous benefactor, and liberal patron. He was renowned for the luxury of his court, for the splendor of his tournaments, for his lavish largess, and his unstinted hospitality. In his court he was always a conspicuous figure, not only on account of his personal beauty and fine physique, but more particularly on account of his customary dress of black velvet, that was strongly marked in contrast with the gay costumes of his courtiers, who arrayed themselves in cloth of gold and silver, and in silk and velvet of every hue.

One day after his return the prince felt unusually amiable, and thinking he would like to have a chat

with his distinguished prisoner, sent to have Sir Bertrand brought before him. Now, Sir John Chandos had strongly urged the Black Prince not to ransom the Breton knight, as he regarded him a most powerful adversary; so powerful, indeed, that he did not consider the English possessions in France secure so long as he was at liberty to head an army against the Black Prince.

The contrast between the Black Prince and the Breton knight was striking. Instead of the elegant figure and gracious dignity of the English prince, Sir Bertrand had a broad figure of middle height, long arms, and small hands; while his complexion was brown, his nose flat, and his eyes green. Also was he rough in manner and somewhat rude in speech; but he was valorous and generous, a man of resources, subtle, prudent, wise, yet daring, never turning back nor leaving unaccomplished anything he had set out to do.

"How are you, Sir Knight?" asked the Black Prince when Sir Bertrand was ushered into his presence.

"My lord," replied Sir Bertrand, "never was I better. I cannot otherwise than be well, for though in prison, I am the most honored knight in the world."

"How so?" exclaimed the prince in surprise.

"They say in France," answered Sir Bertrand, "and also in other countries, that you are so much afraid of me, and have such a dread of my gaining

my liberty, that you dare not set me free; and this is the reason why I think myself so much valued and honored."

"What!" thundered the prince, his pride in arms at once, as Sir Bertrand meant that it should be, "do you imagine, Sir Bertrand, that we keep you a prisoner for fear of your prowess?"

"So 'tis said, my lord," replied Sir Bertrand, coolly.

"To show those who say thus their mistake, you shall be free; set your own ransom," replied the prince, haughtily.

Now Sir Bertrand was not going to let the prince think he valued himself any less highly than did France, therefore he replied with equal haughtiness:

"Not less than for a hundred thousand francs (equal to more than a million francs of the present time), will I take my freedom."

"Where will you get so large a sum?" asked the prince, in amazement.

Thereupon the Breton knight replied grandly:

"My lord the king of Castile will pay one-half; the king of France, the other; and if that be not enough, there is not a Frenchwoman who can spin who would not ply her distaff to my ransom!"

The Breton knight was immediately given his liberty on parole that he might raise this princely ransom, which he did in due time, and again entered

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the service of the French king to the detriment of the English interests in France.

It was after Sir Bertrand's departure from Bordeaux that one morning Sir Gaston was sitting in his window watching the bustle of the busy market-place, and moodily thinking of the disappointment he had met in the lack of substantial recognition of his services in Spain by the Black Prince, and debating whether he should not abandon his fief in Gascony and offer his services to King Charles of France, who had bitterly resented the dismemberment of his kingdom. He was aroused from his reflections by the clatter of horse hoofs on the stone-paved court below. The horsemen pulled up before the door of the inn, and Sir Gaston recognized in them three of his compatriots, good comrades and stanch friends.

They called out his name, and Sir Gaston sent Raimond below to invite them to come up, and also to order refreshment for their attendants, after sending up wine for himself and guests.

"Why art thou not at the Abbey, where monseigneur holds high court to-day?" shouted out Messire de Corèze, a battle-scarred knight of middle age, who was the first to enter the apartment, just as he was the first to enter an affray or battle.

"His highness can well dispense with the attendance of us Gascons," replied Sir Gaston, bitterly.

"*Nom du diable!* thou hast reason," responded another of the three visitors, a man considerably

younger than Messire de Corèze, although his face was also seamed with long healed wounds.

"The prince shows no favor to his Gascon vassals," muttered the third, a fellow of towering height and herculean strength. "Valor is of no account in a Gascon! But there is still more to come! 'Twas scurvy enough to tax further the wretched *manants*, but to expect us seigneurs to make our hearthstones pay his English hordes, 'tis not to be borne! *Tenez*, we have a plan to propose!"

They all sat on the bench, their heads close together, and they talked earnestly and long, though in subdued tones. So engrossed were they that their flagons of wine sat untouched upon the table where they had been put by one of the inn's serving-men soon after their entrance. Though their voices were subdued, frequent exclamations and emphatic gestures betrayed their strong feeling.

The Gascon visitors of Sir Gaston rode away from his lodgings and out the city gates into the open country, and were seen no more about Bordeaux for many a day.

Messire d'Ambricicourt went his way as usual, attending court daily, playing draughts, gambling with the dice, and joining in the hunts. But he was far from content. English dominance was galling. English boast outvied Gascon brag. More even than that, the Islanders wanted to appropriate all the spoils! Then there was that which was even

more galling to his pride: the memory of his discomfiture at Bocasse, his debt to the fair châtelaine —a debt she would not permit him to liquidate; instead, had laid him under new obligations and had scorned his thanks.

Days passed. One morning a mounted messenger appeared at Sir Gaston's lodgings and demanded to have speech with the Sieur d'Ambricicourt. On being admitted to the knight's presence, he murmured these words:

"The time has arrived. Come!"

Then, without another word or sign, he departed.

Sir Gaston did not present himself at court that day, nor the next, nor yet the next. Then the Black Prince remarked upon his absence. Inquiry was made at his lodgings to know why Messire de'Ambricicourt had not waited upon his royal highness, as usual. The answer came that the noble knight had departed over a week ago to visit his château.

To leave the court without permission of the prince was regarded as something approaching treason. However, the prince soon forgot his vassal's breach of loyalty, for he had something of far weightier importance to compel his attention. Two gentlemen—a doctor of laws and a knight—presented themselves at St. Andrew's with a summons from King Charles of France, politely requesting the company of the Black Prince at Paris, in order that

he might answer before a convention of his peers concerning certain griefs which through "weak advice and wrong information, the prelates, barons, knights, and commons of the marches of Gascony, on the frontiers of our kingdom, have suffered at your hands, to our utter amazement."

The Black Prince had returned from Spain a sick man, and the heat of the southern side of the Pyrenees seemed not only to have entered his blood but his spirit also, for his anger blazed out mightily at this message from the King of France, to whom he owed no loyalty, borne as it was by so humble individuals as a knight and a doctor.

Glancing hastily at the credentials presented him by the two messengers, the prince replied haughtily:

"We shall willingly attend on the appointed day at Paris, since the King of France sends for us; but it will be with helmet on head and sixty thousand men at our back!"

The messengers were dismissed with the customary gifts; but so wroth was the prince at the French king's assumption of suzerainty over him, that he ordered the apprehension and imprisonment of the two messengers on some trifling pretext, lest the fact be published abroad and made merry over, that the puissant Prince of Wales, Lord of Aquitaine, the victor of Crèci and Poitiers, had tamely submitted to gross insult in his own palace.

The absence of the Gascon knight was explained.

There had been a movement started for concerted action on the part of the Gascon lords to rise and appeal to the King of France to espouse their cause and protect them against the exactions of their English over-lord. No right, said they, had their hereditary suzerain to acquit himself of his obligations toward any of his vassals; that the dissociation of Gascony from the kingdom of France was not valid as it had not received the consent of the vassals, the obligation between lord and vassal being mutual. Charles V. was very glad to accept this view of the matter, and promised redress to the former vassals of the French crown, for he believed the time ripe to regain what his father had lost. Therefore, France was again in the throes of war.

The Free Companies were rejoiced at the renewal of hostilities, for peace robbed them of their occupation. In times of stress and strife they hired their lances to him who promised the biggest reward; and backed by French gold, Sir Gaston soon found himself at the head of a goodly company of tried men, to whom fear was unknown and death on the battle-field a foregone conclusion; be it sooner or later did not much matter, so long as life was merry while it lasted.

The strife waged was hot and fierce. The Prince of Wales lay between two foes, for the Castilians had again risen up in rebellion against Don Pedro; and his brother Don Enriquez, who now occupied

the throne of Leon and Castile, had promised to aid Charles V.

The French king, knowing that the English had lost heavily in Spain through fever and other complaints incident to a hot climate, and having the promise of the co-operation of the Free Companies, felt himself so secure that he had sent a declaration of war to Edward III., at Westminster, by so mean a messenger as a scullion, thereby showing his contempt for England and the English. Then, also, the Black Prince had refused the vicomty of Limoges to Charles le Mauvais, thus alienating that prince; while Charles V. had taken advantage of the opportunity to attach that king to his cause by giving him the city of Montpelier.

Under these favorable conditions the French fought hopefully and determinedly in their effort to win back the lost French possessions; the English fought grimly and desperately to save a threatened principality. But Edward Prince of Wales and Lord of Aquitaine was no longer the puissant, victorious prince; sickness had made him suspicious and irritable. He was anxious to return to England to secure the succession of the English crown to his young son, for the Black Prince knew he had not much longer to live and that the death of Edward III. was not far off.

Raimond was now seeing something of real warfare, for he was included in Sir Gaston's company,

which about this time was sent to St. Arnaud, a fortress that lay in the path of the English, and where it was necessary to detain the English army for a brief time, to give the French generals opportunity to fortify and victual several strongholds that lay in its rear. It was known that the town was really indefensible, on account of the weakness of its fortifications, but it was absolutely necessary for the French to gain time; therefore, Sir Gaston, who had gained the reputation of a valiant soldier, was sent to hold the place as long as possible, then to cut his way through the enemy best he might. In case he was taken prisoner, the king promised to furnish his ransom.

Sir Gaston said it would not be a case for ransom. Either he would fight his way out, or would he die with sword in hand. Neither would he die alone, as there would be several of his foemen to bear him company.

On his arrival in the town, Sir Gaston advised all who could, to depart, as it would be impossible to hold the place if the English troops were reinforced. The garrison, however, boastfully declared they could hold the town against the whole English army, and among themselves laughed at the knight's fears. The citizens, therefore, decided to remain to protect their property.

Sir Gaston ordered all valuables that could be removed to be conveyed to a place of safety outside

the city, and also bade the monks that inhabited the abbey which formed a part of the wall to vacate it, as that portion of the wall would be more liable to a breach than at any other place.

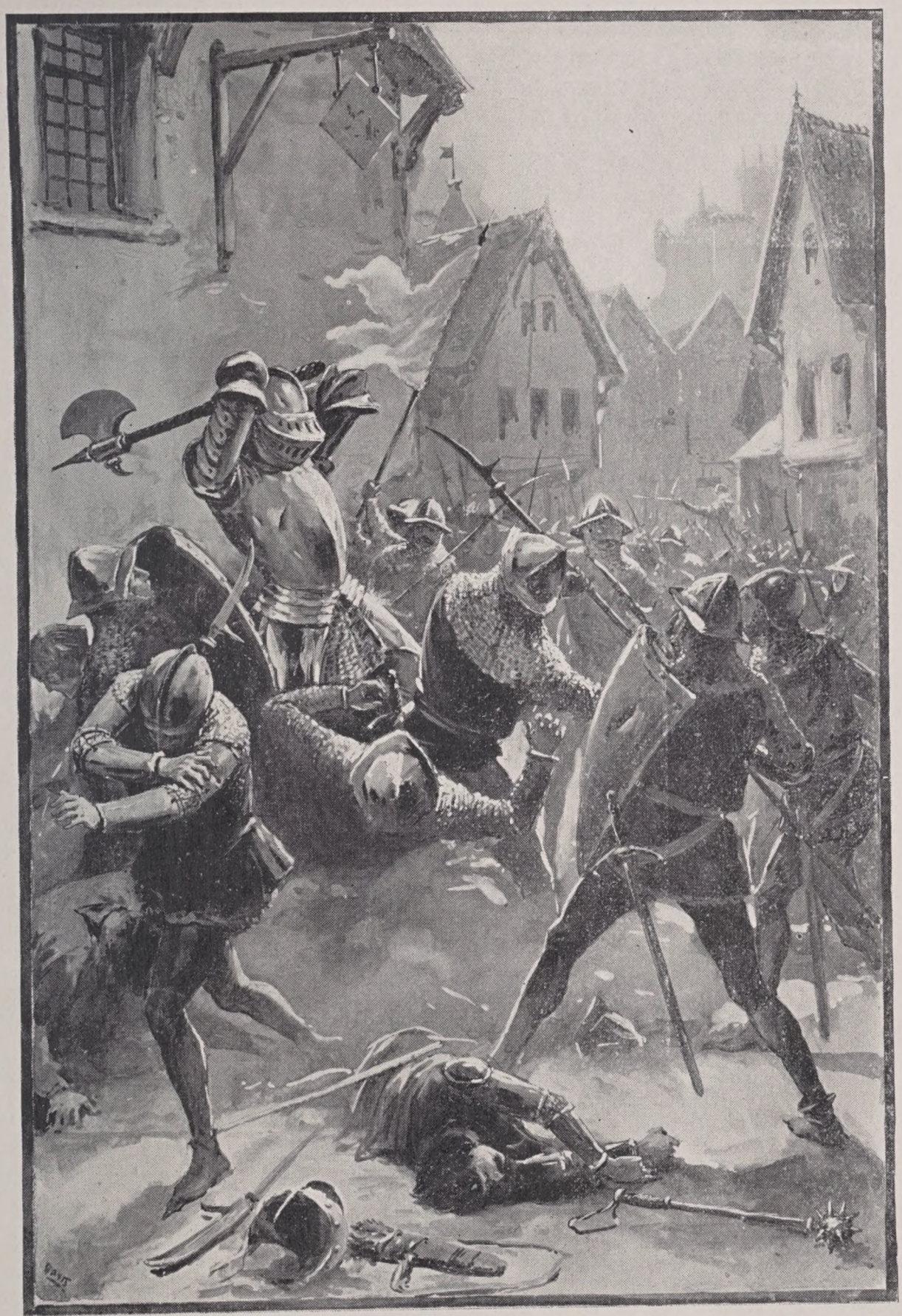
Before Sir Gaston had completed his precautionary measures, an army numbering about twelve thousand burghers appeared before the walls, having been summoned by their lord, the Count of Hainault, who was an ally of the English, to meet him in the vicinity of St. Arnaud. The burghers arrived a day too soon, and instead of awaiting the coming of their lord, they attacked the city gates, trying to force them. The French soldiers sallied forth and repelled the Hainaulters, driving them before their rapid charge and killing a large number of them.

This victory convinced the garrison that they had not overrated their strength and that they could repel any attack of the enemy. So when the Count of Hainault himself appeared before the gates with three thousand men-at-arms, the garrison went forward with confidence to repulse the enemy.

The Hainaulters took the barriers of the gates after a severe struggle, compelling the French to retreat within the city. Swarming upon the walls upon both sides of the gates, they defended the approach with great vigor, hurling down upon the foe great masses of stone, and shooting at them with arrows tipped with red-hot iron. So vigorous was the repulse that the enemy were compelled to with-

draw from before the gates and to seek some place in the wall where it was possible to effect a breach. The attack was directed upon the abbey. Great battering-rams were put into position and sent with crushing force against the walls. The old abbey proved vulnerable, as Sir Gaston had feared; and here he had massed his men to dispute the entrance of the enemy, even though they might succeed in effecting a breach. Great bags of earth had been let down over the walls to break the force of the battering-rams, but these were cleared away, and shock after shock made the old abbey quiver upon its foundations, until at length the masonry began to give; then came a deafening crash, followed by a fall of mortar, bricks, and stone; another and another, until the breach was large enough to admit several of the enemy abreast. Sir Gaston and his company were there to dispute every step. A desperate hand-to-hand encounter ensued. No quarter was given or asked. In poured the Hainaulters, despite the heroic efforts of Sir Gaston and his men to keep them out. Soon as the foremost men were cut down, others filled their place. The breach widened, and the besiegers rushed into the city like an overwhelming flood.

Sir Gaston saw the hopelessness of holding his position, so he withdrew quickly with two hundred of his men-at-arms and a number of Genoese cross-bowmen, with Raimond, as usual, close at his heels,



"Down Went His Assailants, One after Another, before the Sweep of That Mighty Arm."

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and raising his banner in the market-place, made there his last stand for life and honor.

The Hainaulters were thirsting for the blood of those who had done so much hurt to their countrymen the day before, and rushing forward in increasing numbers, drove the garrison through the crooked, narrow streets, hacking, cutting, and killing, giving no quarter, pursuing fugitives from street to street, even from house to house, until they reached the market-place, where Sir Gaston awaited them with his two hundred men-at-arms and his crossbowmen.

Loud rang the market-place with the cries of the conquerors, with clash of steel as battle-axe cleft helmet and cuirass, with shrieks of the wounded, and with defiant shouts of the besieged. Desperately they fought, giving a blow for every one received, and sometimes two. Step by step were they driven backward, heaps of the slain arising on all sides. In the very hottest of the affray was Sir Gaston, swinging his battle-axe about him with telling effect. Down went his assailants one after another before the sweep of the mighty arms and deadly axe. Thick rained the lances against the desperate knight, who was no longer fighting to protect the city nor to save his life, but fighting for blood with all the bloodthirstiness of a ravening beast of prey. A lance struck his right arm; he took his axe in the left. An arrow struck his wrist, breaking it, and put him at the mercy of his foeman. Quickly they

pressed in about him. He fell, and his body was hidden from sight under those of his comrades who succumbed before the overwhelming numbers of the assailants. Those of the garrison who had so far escaped were now pursued and massacred.

Raimond, who had received a flesh wound, had baptized his sword in blood. He had kept near Sir Gaston all during the fray until the very last, when the Hainaulters had pressed so closely around the defenceless knight that rescue was impossible. No one had taken much notice of him. There was no glory in striking down a boy, neither much ransom in his capture. He made his way down a side street, and finding a door that had been broken in, slipped inside, hoping that he was safe. But the fury of the Hainaulters had not yet abated. Soon he saw smoke ascending skyward; then flames burst forth. Not content with slaying the inhabitants, they had applied the torch to the town. Warfare was then cruel, pitiless, inhuman. After sacking and burning the town, the enemy departed.

Raimond dragged himself to the half-ruined abbey, where, at least, he would be safe from fire. For days he lived there, finding food in the larders which the monks had left, until his wounds had sufficiently healed to enable him to travel. Believing Sir Gaston to be dead, not yet strong enough for active service, he concluded to return to Bocasse, though he would be obliged to travel on foot, for he

had lost everything save the clothes he stood in, except his armor. This he left in the abbey, for it would be of no use to him in his journey across the country, which was disrupted by war and over which the Free Companies roamed in search of booty. He could not travel as a squire; he would be either slain or held for ransom. An idea seized him. He would appropriate one of the monks' frocks that hung in the closets. His face was smooth, and by bringing the cowl well over his forehead he could conceal the fact that his head was not shorn.

Raimond was a well-grown youth, and had no difficulty in finding a frock that would fit him. He appropriated also a pouch such as mendicant friars carried, and in this guise set out for Bocasse, light in pocket but heavy at heart, for sorrowful indeed was he at the loss of his patron, the gallant Gascon knight.

Footsore and weary was he ere half the distance between St. Arnaud and Bocasse was traversed. Often went he without food or bed, living on the doles of benevolent strangers and sleeping where he could. Sometimes he came near falling into the enemies' hands, though little would they concern themselves about a poor friar, unless in the way of sport.

At length, toward the close of day, he joyfully ascended the last hill that lay between him and his

home. Once at the top, the town and castle of Bocasse spreading out at its feet, instead of descending with light and nimble feet, he stood still and groaned, for a great and painful surprise awaited the arrival of the young squire.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SURPRISE.

When war was renewed with the French, the Prince of Wales had proclaimed that all châteaux, fortresses, and towns taken by his captains should be their property. As Bocasse was a fertile domain, producing a goodly revenue, it was the desire of many a knight; and it was not many months after the breaking out of hostilities, while the King of Navarre was up north aiding the French king, when an army was sitting down before its walls.

Its châtelaine, however, had not been caught unprepared. She knew that the fortunes of war are variable, and that she must depend upon herself and her people for safety. As soon as a report came that an armed force had appeared in the vicinity of Bocasse, she gave orders for the peasants to drive their cattle within shelter of the castle walls, where there was also refuge for themselves and their families. The people of the town of Bocasse were advised to bring their valuables to the donjon of the château for safe-keeping, or to take them to the church to be concealed within its vaults; also to be

on guard against a surprise, and, as many as would, to repair to the château on the first hint of a threatened attack.

Château de Bocasse was a fair specimen of a French castle in the fourteenth century. In the centre was the donjon, or keep, where were stored the family records and treasure, and which was also intended as a last resort in case the château should be forced, as, being the highest and strongest tower, it was the least vulnerable.

Surrounding the keep was a range of buildings in the form of a square, leaving an inner court between the buildings and the keep. In this range of buildings were the family apartments. On the first floor of one side was the banqueting hall, its walls being decorated with armor, while carved joists supported the ceiling above. Over the banqueting hall were the châtelaine's apartments; in the larger room Lady Yvette would sit with her women while they all worked over their embroidery frames. Adjoining was her sleeping "closet"; beyond was a series of guest chambers. On another side of the square were the rooms devoted to the use of the officers of the household; the remaining two sides were occupied by the chapel, the kitchen, and the quarters of the servants.

Both inner and outer walls had crenelated battlements four feet high, with projecting turrets at the corners of the walls, and one in the middle of each

side. The keep was twenty feet higher than the inner wall, which in turn was twelve feet higher than the outer wall, the latter being twelve feet thick and thirty feet high. The whole was surrounded by a moat containing from six to eight feet of water.

From the above description of Bocasse it will be seen that the lady had nothing to fear save from an army regularly equipped with war engines and besieging apparatus. The garrison was small, it was true; but it consisted of well-tried men and was commanded by Messire de Bonciel, a most energetic and efficient captain. So the Lady Yvette rested reasonably secure in her fortress home, feeling fully competent to protect herself and her people against any depredating bands.

The task of putting the castle into a state of defence had been a welcome one to the young châtelaine, for it caused a diversion of her thoughts. She had sorely missed her handsome Gascon guest and lover, much more than she was willing to acknowledge even to herself. Sometimes she reproached herself for having ridden home from him that night when she had rescued him from the Spaniards and Navarrese without a word of greeting or parting; then she comforted herself with the thought that he would stop at Bocasse on his way back from Spain, to thank its lady for her very efficient help in time of dire need. As time passed,

and he made no sign, her proud spirit rose up in arms.

"In very truth," she exclaimed, "it was the domain he wanted, and not its lady! Had his true courtesy been as great as his courage, he would have requited himself of the obligation by returning thanks for his delivery to his deliverer! But it is evident he thinks only of himself. He is no true knight!"

This would she repeat again and again; still would her heart rebel against the conclusions of her pride, and still would she seek excuse for the handsome Gascon knight.

"He was obliged to hasten on to Spain, and had no opportunity to visit at Bocasse; he will stop on his return after the trouble in Spain is over," were the whisperings of her love.

But the time came when the Black Prince and his men returned to Bordeaux, yet did not Sir Gaston appear and claim admittance to Château de Bocasse. Could it be that he had been killed, or had died of a fever on the other side of the Pyrenees? Or was he angry that the Maid of Bocasse had denied him her lands and her hand?

Then came the news of the Gascon revolt, followed by the business of putting the castle into a state of defence. And one day there came frightened peasants with their goods and children flocking to the château; and, later, some of the townspeople,

though most of them preferred to remain in the town to save what they could of their possessions. A money tribute might buy them immunity. So when an English captain of a Free Company, called Sir Hugh de Beverly, appeared with a large force, he was met by a deputation of the townspeople, who begged his clemency, and asked how little would satisfy his demands and save the town. The English knight put the price so high that the people could not raise the amount, so the town was delivered to the sack.

In one of the turrets surmounting the walls, Lady Yvette beheld the extremity of the town. She had sent half of her garrison to its aid, but they had been overpowered, many of them being killed, the rest driven out of the neighborhood.

Later came the attack on the château. First did Sir Hugh try to take the castle by *escalade*—that is, by scaling the walls. One night he had the moat filled with trees cut down from the mountainside; these were covered with earth, thus affording a passage. All night the besiegers worked under cover of darkness in order to avoid the arrows of the archers stationed upon the castle walls. Early in the morning they crossed the moat and placed their ladders against the walls. Holding their shields above their heads, they attempted to mount the ladders. But great piles of stones had been placed at intervals along the walls, and these were hurled

down on them through the loopholes. Great roaring fires had been lighted in the towers, and over them was heated the oil that was even more deadly in effect than the huge stones. The women were by no means idle. Under the direction of the young châtelaine, they prepared the fire-balls of hemp saturated with oil, and lighted them for the archers to drop on the ascending men.

It did not take long for Sir Hugh de Beverly to find out, as Sir Gaston d'Ambricicourt had done before him, that Château de Bocasse could not be taken by *escalade.* So he had recourse to a great stone-throwing engine, one capable of projecting stones weighing a hundred pounds; but the inhabitants of the château kept behind its thick walls, upon which the stones made little impression.

The following day the besiegers remained inactive; the reason therefor was seen the next morning, when a huge structure on wheels was pushed in front of the walls. This erection consisted of several stories, the top one protected by a roof, but not so high as the castle walls. These covered platforms were filled with archers, who shot steadily at the men who appeared upon the walls as well as at the loopholes. Under cover of the movable tower, a huge battering-ram manned by fifty men was directed against the solid masonry. The shock was terrific, but no impression was made upon the castle. Again and again they charged, but the walls resisted every

shock. Meanwhile the arrows flew back and forth overhead. The archers on the walls could not reach the men at the battering-ram without firing down from over the battlements, for they were out of range of the loopholes, and as soon as a head appeared above the crenelated battlements it was pierced by an arrow sent from the tower. The attack continued without other result all that day, but was not renewed the next morning. There was no sign from the enemy's camp that day, nor the following, nor still the next, nor for a week. Evidently they were going to try to starve the castle into capitulation.

Then was all vigilance exercised within the walls to guard against surprise. Orders were issued that under no pretext or for any reason whatever should any one be admitted, not even an envoy from the town or abbey, nor any one who might promise to bring them supplies, as such ones might be agents of the enemy seeking to take the castle by stratagem —not even, should the enemy withdraw; for the withdrawal might be nothing but a ruse.

The excitement brought back the flash to the châtelaine's beautiful eyes, that had been somewhat dimmed since the departure of her rejected lover, for regret was still battling with pride in the heart of the haughty young woman. The castle was well provisioned, and the besiegers could ill afford to spend so much time before its walls, when richer

prizes were to be had, those stirring times, for less time and trouble. And thus the days passed.

One early morning Lady Yvette was passing through the courtyard, when she stopped before a tub of water that had been put there for the dogs to drink from. She gazed at it intently for a few moments, and then bade a page who attended her seek Messire de Bonciel and request him to come hither at once. The captain of the guard was not long in responding to the summons. Lady Yvette did not utter a word, but pointed to the water in the tub, that was vibrating as if the tub were being shaken.

"*Nom du diable!*" exclaimed the captain. "A mine!"

That was the only explanation of the moving water. The enemy were undermining the walls, and must now be at work very near, perhaps under that very tub of water.

It did not take long for Messire de Bonciel to call his men and to set sappers at work to countermine. The men-at-arms were bidden prepare for a desperate struggle. All the women and children were ordered to take refuge in the keep, as were also the old and wounded men. The male portion of the peasants were directed to mass within the inner court, and to arm themselves as best they could. Even if the outer line of walls were passed, Messire de Bonciel hoped to defend successfully the inner line. Still, unless the enemy were headed off, it

looked serious for the inhabitants of the château on account of the disparity between the two forces.

It was already too late. The mine had progressed too far. Suddenly a rumble was heard, followed by a terrific crash; a part of the outer wall had fallen. Through the breach swarmed the English, and a terrible hand-to-hand fight ensued. At length Messire de Bonciel gave the signal to withdraw within the inner court. The garrison, or what remained of it, rushed to the gate, which was opened from within. The captain of the guard, with a number of his men-at-arms, held the enemy at bay while their companions found safety within the inner court. After all were inside the gate, these brave men backed step by step, defending themselves manfully all the while. They were almost inside, the portcullis was ready to descend, when, with a rush and a cry, Sir Hugh de Beverly and his followers made a dash, and succeeded in getting inside before the iron gate was let down. The inner court then became the scene of another fearful struggle. The garrison were at every disdvantage, not only because small in number, but they were embarrassed in their movements by the peasants, who ran hither and thither, mad with fright.

At length, wounded and bleeding, Messire de Bonciel was obliged to surrender. Seeing their leader a prisoner, the garrison retreated to the donjon. Then Sir Hugh called upon the captain to

order the surrender of the garrison also. The brave gentleman said he must first consult his lady, for the donjon was strong and his men were not all dead or wounded.

"She shall have one hour to deliberate," said Sir Hugh. "Meantime we will refresh ourselves within"; and he pointed to the living-rooms.

Lady Yvette was for holding out. The donjon walls were massive and strong; with the remnant of the garrison there, the enemy would have to fight hard to take it. But Messire de Bonciel pointed out to the lady the hopelessness of the situation. He himself was a prisoner on parole, the garrison might not be able to hold the keep, neither were the provisions sufficient to last many days to feed so large a number. By yielding now, she would make better terms for herself and her people than by prolonging the struggle.

"Procure the best terms you can," she said at last, yielding much against her will, "and report to me."

A few moments of the allotted hour still remained, and these were utilized by Messire de Bonciel in having his wounds dressed by the leech, or surgeon. When the hour was up, he sent a page to Sir Hugh de Beverly, saying that the Lady of Bocasse had a communication to make to him through her captain of the guard, Messire de Bonciel.

"Late captain of the late guard, would better describe his office, methinks," said Sir Hugh de Bev-

erly, with a chuckle. "Say to the gentleman who lately commanded what no longer exists, that I await the communication of his lady."

It was with much difficulty and through much pain that Messire de Bonciel made his way to the banqueting hall, where the Red Knight was regaling himself with food and drink.

"Well, what hath thy lady to say?" asked Sir Hugh, indifferently.

"My lady bids me ask you, Sir Knight, if you will accept a large treasure and leave Bocasse in peace."

"Say to thy lady that Sir Hugh will take both treasure and castle, whether peaceably or forcibly is for her to decide," replied the English knight, coolly, taking a deep draught from a silver tankard that stood on the table beside him.

"The donjon is strong, Sir Knight; the garrison sturdy, though reduced in number, and time is precious. While you are consuming the days here, richer booty, no doubt, awaits you elsewhere," urged Messire de Bonciel.

"What you say is true. Too much time has already been wasted here before the castle. I will permit no more delay. Either your lady surrenders at once or the donjon shall be stormed and taken before I sleep. In the latter case, no life will be spared, not even that of your lady or her women, not even of any child."

It was with a heavy heart that Messire de Bon-

ciel returned to the donjon, where Lady Yvette impatiently awaited him.

"What is your news?" she asked eagerly, as soon as he entered her presence.

"Unconditional surrender, or death to every one," he replied despondently.

"Never will the Lady of Bocasse yield to such humiliating terms!" she exclaimed. "Rather would I die! A thousand deaths would I suffer rather than endure such ignominy!"

"To die is easy—for one's self, my lady; but in dying yourself you condemn to death many that you would prefer should live."

"Let him who would surrender do so! Even my friend and my dear late father's friend!" she exclaimed, pointing imperiously to the door.

"Does my late lord's daughter address such words to me, her loyal servitor, even though he has failed in defending his trust?" asked Messire de Bonciel, reproachfully.

"But it is thou who urge upon me this hateful thing," she answered, softened at once.

"It is because there is nothing else," he rejoined, dejectedly. "They are many; we are few. They can undermine the donjon, and we cannot prevent them. We are lost. Surrender now, and your fate will be less dreadful than another defeat would make it. Death might be tardy in coming."

His words were full of dire meaning. Lady

Yvette shuddered. She paced the floor agitatedly for a few moments, then stopped before him and said:

"These are my last words: If all who would shall be permitted to leave the castle, taking with them what each may carry, horses to be allowed me and my women and such of the garrison who are able to accompany me, all who remain to be spared in life and goods, being permitted to return peaceably to their several vocations, then will the Lady of Bocasse yield, but on no other conditions. Rather will we shut ourselves up in the donjon, holding out to the last; then each killing himself to avoid that which would be worse."

Again Messire de Bonciel sought Sir Hugh, repeating his instructions.

"It is for conquerors to make conditions," said Sir Hugh. "However, tell your lady with her alone will I treat. Let her come hither. If we may not agree to terms, she shall be free to return to the donjon without let or hindrance."

The Red Knight took little thought of the fair sex. He mingled little in the society of women; to him they were of no more importance than any other necessary being. He had not married, though nearly forty years of age. He was thinking of it now, as an heir of his own blood to his name and many holdings was a desirable thing. Yet, despite his indifference to feminine beauty, the appearance be-

fore him of Lady Yvette in a costume of silk and fur, flashing with jewels, beautiful, regal, haughty, in perfect health, almost as tall as he himself, meeting his bold gaze firmly, unflinchingly, calmly—gave rise to a very peculiar sensation in his heart, a sensation unfamiliar but not at all unpleasant. For the first time had he awakened to admiration for a woman higher than that for a dog or a horse.

Sir Hugh de Beverly—or the Red Knight as he was called on account of the color of his coat-of-arms*—on the contrary, had no claim to good looks. He was gaunt in stature, though possessed of great strength. He was coarse in feature and rude of manner. It was his boast that he could eat as much as four men and drink as much as ten. When the young châtelaine appeared before him he was impressed by her beauty, by the dignity of her bearing, by the richness of her dress; thereupon he straightway decided not only to take the château but everything connected with it, its châtelaine included.

Sir Hugh was not a man to waste words.

"The châtelaine of Bocasse is worthy the domain. It were a pity to rob each of the other," he said as he surveyed the young girl with eyes full of rude admiration. "Therefore will I not part them."

The heart of Lady Yvette beat high with hope.

* The coat-of-arms was a garment worn over the suit of mail, and on which was embroidered the knight's crest.

"The lady shall go with the castle," he continued. "Praise be to the saints, I am not yet married. Let the father be summoned, and he shall make thee my wife."

Lady Yvette regarded the speaker with mingled astonishment and indignation.

"My lord may have captured the château, but he has yet to take the lady!" And Lady Yvette turned her back upon Sir Hugh and walked out of the apartment, holding her head very high and straight, and looking neither to the right nor the left.

"*Par les cornes du diable!*" exclaimed the knight. "My lady is somewhat testy."

He sat quietly in his chair for a while, then bade Vivien de Sellac, a favorite squire, seek Messire de Bonciel and inform him that he might tell his lady that Sir Hugh would accede to her terms. She and her people would be permitted to leave the castle, bearing with them as much as they could carry; she, her women, and wounded men to be allowed horses; the men-at-arms to go out in their armor, and the town of Bocasse to be exempt from further ill. However, he would counsel the Lady Yvette to wait till morning before setting out on her journey, as the day was already far spent.

All that night Lady Yvette and her people were engaged in packing up their most valuable possessions in as small a compass as possible, and at day-

break the next morning a small party on horseback emerged from the gates of the castle, heavily laden, but with heavier hearts.

There were but few men-at-arms to escort the banished châtelaine, for most of the garrison remained at the château either dead or too badly wounded to be able to sit a horse, the Red Knight having promised that all the sick should be cared for and given their liberty without ransom, so soon as they were sufficiently recovered to travel. Great was the surprise among the followers of the Red Knight at his generous terms, as he usually exacted the last *denier* from all who came within his power.

"'Tis the lady's fair face," was the explanation passed from mouth to mouth.

Messire de Bonciel advised his lady to seek refuge at the court of the King of Navarre; accordingly, they took the road to Nérac. They travelled all day, expecting to reach their destination the second afternoon. Just as the fast-sinking sun was glinting the thatched peaked roofs of the outlying buildings of the village where they expected to pass the night, they heard the clatter of hoofs behind them. Glancing back, they saw they were being pursued by a large body of horsemen. Suddenly there came the command to halt. Instead, Messire de Bonciel seized his lady's bridle rein, and putting spurs to his horse, galloped away with her at full speed, leaving



"Messire Bonciel Seized His Lady's Bridle Rein and, Putting Spurs to His Horse, Galloped Away at Full Speed."

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the rest of the party behind. Beyond the village, on the hillside, stood a monastery; his purpose was to reach it and claim sanctuary for his lady and himself. Swiftly flew the horses, in spite of their long day's journey; furiously followed three horsemen in close pursuit. Through the village, knocking down little children, trampling upon dogs, who were too dazed by the sudden charge of flying hoofs to get out of the road, up the hillside, sped the horsemen, two in advance, but the three in the rear close behind. Messire de Bonciel's wound broke out afresh and began to bleed profusely, but he did not know it. His steed flagged, but he dug the spurs deeper into his already lacerated flanks. Seeming to understand what was expected of him, the noble animal exerted all his fast-failing strength and leaped forward fleeter than ever. A few rods farther and they would be safe; but the horse staggered, drew himself up once more, and plunged forward, blinded by approaching death; then stumbled, caught himself again, only, however, to fall, to breathe once or twice, then to stiffen in his death agony, his rider beneath him.

Lady Yvette did not stop. She scarcely noticed what had happened. Her one idea was to reach safety. Her own horse was failing. When just in front of the monastery gate, already calling "Sanctuary! Sanctuary!" her bridle-rein was seized on both sides by two men, and her horse was brought

to a standstill. Then a third man lifted her from her horse on to his own, putting her in front of him. The color of his coat-of-arms was red, and he hissed into her ear these words:

"Whatever Sir Hugh de Beverly wills is done!"

CHAPTER IX.

FROM BOCASSE TO LIMOGES.

If there had been any one about when Raimond reached that point on the hillside whence could be seen the town and château of Bocasse, there would have been two surprised individuals instead of one; for it was not a common occurrence to see a frocked friar go leaping, running, and singing along his road; neither were the ease and grace of the motions of the supposed friar enhanced by the somewhat ample folds of the frock, which, becoming entangled in his scabbard's point, would ever and anon almost throw him over on his nose. Raimond had felt that the end of his hardships and perils was nigh; all he had to do was to present himself at the castle gates to receive a hearty welcome and substantial cheer. He had dropped the rôle of a mendicant friar before he had discarded the dress, and therefore was it that a chance observer would have felt somewhat bewildered at the strange actions of the supposed friar on reaching the top of the hill. The chanson ceased abruptly on a high note with the singer's jaws stretched to their widest capacity; the skirt, which

for convenience's sake had been held up on either side, and now dropping limply from the nerveless hands, was caught up by the sword-hilt, giving a side view of the wearer's legs, that were not at all in keeping with the priestly garb; the cowl that was jauntily poised over one eye revealed on the other side the long, curling brown hair that did not bespeak the tonsured pate of a monk.

He pushed back the hood altogether from his head, and looked hard at the smoke-blackened town that he had left so short a time before comparatively prosperous and happy; then his gaze went to the camp in front of the walls of the château, and he tried to read the device on the fluttering banners and pennons, but they were too distant even for his sharp sight to distinguish. From town to castle, from castle to town, wandered his gaze. Suddenly he squatted himself down disconsolately in the middle of the dusty road, put his elbows on his knees, rested his chin in his hands, and still gazed. Save in those slowly moving eyes, there seemed to be no more animation in that human heap than in one of the rocks by the roadside. Presently it was slightly agitated by the inhaling of a deep, full breath, and while expelling it, the lips formed the words:

"*Nom du diable!*"

Then again he looked steadily before him, again so motionless that a bird, who had been eying him inquiringly from an overhanging branch, fluttered

down and stationed itself in the road before the boy, blinking his little bright eyes with a quizzical air, as if in amusement at the whole proceedings. The little bird peeped and chirped, twittered and pecked, still the boy did not even glance at him. Again came a deep inspiration, the expiration being accompanied by the words:

"*Mort de ma vie!*"

And still he sat and gazed, but the little bird flew away to a branch away up in the air.

"Bocasse! To the rescue!" And springing to his feet, the boy fairly flew down the hillside, his long gown almost throwing him more than once by twisting about his sword and legs. What caused this sudden display of agility was the sight of a battering ram, carried by half a hundred men, being jammed against the castle walls. He knew the garrison was small, and that if the walls should succumb to the onslaught, it would be all over with the inhabitants of Bocasse.

Down the hillside he ran, across the fields, until almost on the edge of the camp, when he suddenly remembered his disguise. He pulled the hood of his frock over his head and down about the eyes, he disentangled his skirt from his sword hilt, and, assuming a heavy, lumbering gait, went about the hangers-on of the camp, begging alms in the whining tones of a professional mendicant.

"My son, what hast thou to give to the church?"

"My daughter, make thy peace with the saints while there is yet time. The sins of the faithful are forgotten when the church intercedes. But why should she concern herself about one who has no thought or gift for her? Come, what will you give?" concluded he, addressing a group collectively.

"Faith, not a *denier* to such as thou who wear the frock with so ill a grace," exclaimed a woman.

"*Tiens*, daughter, the grace of a friar is from within, not without," declared the supposed friar.

"'Tis little grace thee has inside or outside, I'm thinking," put in a man, "and little will the church benefit by what goes into thy pouch."

"*Pardie*, that which goes into my pouch may later on go into my stomach, greatly to its comfort and refreshment."

"*Mordieu*, but thou'rt new to the trade, or thou'd not speak up so frankly," replied the man.

"In very truth so new, I wish I were newer and had never entered it. 'Tis ill work travelling on an empty stomach!"

"There's plenty to eat here," struck in one of the women.

"No, no, daughter, I must not break bread yet. I must go farther and, perhaps, fare worse;" and with a few muttered words as if in blessing, he withdrew. He lounged about the camp questioning this one and that, till he had gained much valuable in-

formation. By the time night had come, he saw the futility of the enemy's attempts to batter down the walls, and he decided the only way left them was to take the château by stratagem, which he knew would be almost impossible so long as his uncle was in command of the guard; or else to starve them into surrender, and that he meant to prevent by bringing reinforcements from the army of the King of Navarre.

He slept that night in the camp, stealing away at daybreak, going back over the road by which he had just come. He hoped to meet a French or Gascon company of men-at-arms, whose aid he could enlist in his lady's behalf by the promise of big largess.

It was weary travelling. His shoes were worn, and his feet were bruised and blistered; he found no huts where he could beg bread or refuge, for the whole country had been ravaged by companies of freebooters; even the huts of those who had given him food on his late journey were now nothing but blackened ruins. Once he heard from a wayfarer like himself that a company of English were travelling northward by the same road Raimond had taken, and fearing lest he be overtaken, his disguise penetrated, and himself captured, he took a wide *detour* and lost his way. Thus he journeyed many days, living on little or nothing. Once he stopped at a monastery and begged food and shelter for the

night. He told the whole truth about himself, and as he was in Gascony, the sympathy of the brothers was with him and his lady, and when he departed the next morning it was with bread and money in his pouch.

Some days later he came upon a ruined village on a river's edge in Aquitaine, the enemy's country; the mud huts were roofless, the thatch having been fired, the streets were deserted, no sign of human being was visible, only dogs basking in the sunshine, their bones seeming ready to break through the skin for very leanness. He rested himself a while in one of the huts; then going down to the riverside, he saw a shed under which was a flat-bottomed boat. As the river flowed in a northerly direction, he concluded to take to it, for a time at least, in order to save his feet. He found a pair of oars, launched his boat, stepped in, and pulled off. The change was an agreeable one, but his stomach was very empty, as he had eaten all his bread and had not visited any place where he could buy more, so heavy had the hand of war been laid upon the neighborhood. He kept a lookout for any human habitation he might pass, but the afternoon sun was warm, he was weary and occasionally his head would nod and his eyes close in sleep. Suddenly he awakened with a start. He sat up straight and looked about him. On one side of the river were high limestone cliffs; on the other, rolling meadows. His eyes,

heavy with sleep and dazed by the bright sunlight, scarcely took heed of what they dimly saw, till he was further aroused by a loud cry:

"Help!"

It was a cry of distress. Raimond looked hurriedly about him. It seemed to come from the face of the cliffs. Then he saw that the cliffs had openings in them, and that the lower one was reached by a narrow ascending ledge, and that the cry seemed to come from that opening.

Again and again was the cry repeated. It was a dangerous thing to do, but Raimond was a youth to act first and think afterward, so he rowed toward the ledge, stepped up on it, and pulling his boat after him lest it be carried away by the current and leave him stranded there, peered into the circular opening. It was so dark within that he could discern nothing clearly; so he entered. He made no sound, though the cries of distress continued; yet, not knowing what he might chance upon within, he returned no answer. What was his astonishment to find that the opening gave entrance into a stable hewn out of the rock. Even the mangers were carved out of the stone walls. The stalls were empty, but showed that they had been recently inhabited by four-footed occupants.

Raimond stood still and gazed about him. Above was a perpendicular well-like boring, and through it hung a rude rope ladder; below there was a similar

opening, evidently a well. Through the upper opening came the exclamation:

"*Que Dieu soit beni!*"

Raimond glanced upward and saw a white face peering down at him through the opening.

"What is the matter?" asked the boy.

"He is dead! Save me!"

"Save thee from what?"

"From their vengeance!" came in a hurried whisper.

"From whose vengeance?" asked Raimond.

"What does that matter? Wilt thou save me or not? Decide quickly, or it will be too late."

"Too late for what?"

"A pest on thy questions! The devil take thee!" and the face disappeared.

Raimond cogitated a few seconds. The rope ladder dangled temptingly before his eyes. What awaited him above? Should he ascend? Why not? There was but one death to die.

So he nimbly climbed the rope ladder, and soon found himself in the second story of this strange cave dwelling. As he stepped up on to the stone floor, he started back in dismay, narrowly escaping a fall through the hole, when life would have been over with him, for he was confronted by the strangest-looking figure he had ever seen. He could not tell whether it was that of a child or a gnome; he was inclined to believe it to be that of an evil sprite that

had lured him up there to feed upon his flesh at leisure. The figure was small and stout, the head seeming to grow out of the breast on account of the stoop of the shoulders. The face was round, but of a death-like pallor; the nose large and flat, the lips full and protruding. The arms were long, the hands white and claw-like. He was crouching before Raimond, and looked like some fabled monster, half-man, half-beast. The similarity was heightened by a crescent-like structure he wore on top of the small cap, that covered his head and which rose up back of his forehead in the shape of horns. The chamber was lighted by a pine torch dipped in pitch, and the lurid glare was reflected in the gems that adorned his garb, which was of a fantastic nature. One-half the body of his doublet was pink, the other half blue; one sleeve was white, the other yellow; one leg of the skin-tight hose that extended up to his thighs was green, the other purple; his long pointed shoes were red; his cap was of black velvet, ornamented by a large silver crescent.

The long arms were stretched out in gesture of appeal.

"Take me away!" he cried.

The creature's appearance of terror reassured Raimond, who said decidedly:

"First thou must tell me everything."

"Come, and I will show thee." And he led the way through a narrow passage to a large stone cham-

ber lighted by means of a round hole that overlooked the river, and through which the creature had called to Raimond, whom he had seen in the boat.* The floor of the apartment was covered with animal skins; in one corner was a bed of straw, also covered with skins. On it lay the form of a man already stiff in death.

"See, he is dead!" exclaimed the dwarf; "and when they come back they will say I have killed him by poison, and torture me to make me confess."

If a man or women died in those days from natural causes before passing middle age, the suspicion of poison was always aroused. The attendants of the person, if an individual of any importance, were at once apprehended and commanded to tell all they knew. In order to escape the horrors of the torture chamber they were ready to charge the death on any one connected with the dead person, especially any one who by any cause whatever incurred the ill-will of the neighbors. Raimond knew the dwarf's personal appearance was against him, and that he would in all probability be accused of conniving with the Evil One to destroy this man. In his heart he believed it very likely that this strange-looking creature had been concerned in the man's death, and he hesitated whether to attempt to succor him. The

* The remains of this ancient fortress are still to be seen. It is called La Roque de Tayac, because of the village that now faces it from the other side of the river.

impression was strengthened by the peculiar actions of the dwarf, who was capering about the corpse, stopping every moment or two to spit upon it.

"Hoho! No more wilt thou revile me because of the misfortune Heaven has cursed me with! No more will I have to do thy unholy bidding, else be seized by the nape of the neck and shaken till the breath has almost left my body. No more wilt thou by thy fiendish malignancy cause me to grit my teeth lest a cry escape me to make thee gloat over suffering thou hast caused! No more wilt thou rob those weaker than thyself! No more wilt thou oppress the poor and abuse the wretched! What good now are the treasures thou hast helped accumulate, when not one *denier* will go to pay masses for thy miserable soul?"

He stopped, not because he had no more to say, but because his breath was spent.

"Who art thou? What art thou? Who is he!" asked Raimond, devoutly crossing himself and muttering a prayer.

"I am a free man who was once the slave of that dog!" answered the dwarf. "I am called Joli-cœur, because I make others laugh, though my heart be heavy with weariness. I was once the jester of a knight, whom I offended because I told him the truth, and he bade me begone from his sight, and gave me to that pig of a man, who was once the leader of one of the knight's bands of freebooters.

He brought me here and left me in charge of the ladder while he and his men went off on their expeditions of plundering. The band is now in pursuit of a rich caravan that they heard was on its way northward from La Provence. He was ill of fever and could not go; now he is dead, and with thy help I shall be free, and we both shall be rich, for I know of chests of gold, and of gems, and of silks, and of what not. But we shall fill our pouches with gold only and get away before the band returns, which may be to-morrow, or next week, or next month."

"Why hast thou not escaped before during the absence of thy masters?" asked Raimond.

"Could I go unaided down the rope ladder with my poor twisted legs? Neither have I seen any one pass by whom I felt I could trust."

Then Raimond saw his feet were all awry, and that his legs were twisted and crooked.

"Hast thou any food?" now asked the half-famished boy.

"In plenty. If thou wilt promise to do my bidding, not only shalt thou fill thy stomach with food of the best, but thou shalt have enough gold to make thee live at ease the rest of thy life."

"Why dost thou think I will aid thee any more than another?"

"Because first I took thee to be a friar; now because I see thou art an honest youth, who for some

reason of his own is masquerading in what does not belong to him."

"Bring out thy food, and we will talk later."

"Thou must give me thy promise first."

"I will promise to take thee down the ladder on my back. More than that I'll not promise till I know what thou wouldst have of me," replied Raimond, prudently; for he still suspected the dwarf, fearing he was one of those wicked demons who lure men to eternal destruction by fair words and big promises.

"Swear upon the cross!"

Raimond took the required oath, and soon after was sitting down before a hearty meal of meat, bread, and wine. While he was satisfying his hunger, Joli-cœur told him of the treasure-room where were stored all sorts of precious things. Even while he was eating, the dwarf, by dint of great striving, dragged out several small coffers, opened them, and displayed to Raimond's ravished eyes shining gold pieces, packed neatly in rows, and jewels of great value.

"We can let the chests down by means of a rope; then thou shalt take me down on thy back, after we have stuffed our pouches with gems. I will get four bags which we will fill with gold from one of the chests; then we will let down the other chests into the water, to await our return. We will go in thy boat till we reach a place where we may buy

horses, and the rest of the way we'll make at our ease."

"When dost thou expect the company to return?"

"Who knows? To-morrow or next month. Some of them are coming and going constantly. The sooner we depart the better."

"First I must have sleep," said Raimond, decidedly.

"Very well. Sleep till daybreak. Then we must be off if we would save our lives. For thou art in as much danger as I. Should any of the band return unexpectedly and find thee here, they'd make short work of slitting thy throat and throwing thy carcass into the river below."

The next morning Raimond tried to persuade Joli-cœur to remain but one more night in the rocky fortress, while he procured horses and men to carry off more of the treasure. But Joli-cœur answered:

"I will go with thee this very morning, or not at all. If thou goest alone, on thy return thou'lt find no ladder ready for thy ascent."

"Very well," sighed Raimond, "then it shall be as thou sayst."

"First will we let down the boxes with this stout hempen rope; then wilt thou take me on thy shoulders, and once below, we will give the rope ladder a twist and a fling, and down it will go into the well, where none will ever find it. When the company

return and find the ladder gone and me not above, they will be mad with rage and despair."

"Scaling ladders could reach the hole," said Raimond.

"Aye; but could any of sufficient length be brought through the opening below?"

"The materials could be brought within, and the ladders then constructed."

"Surely," rejoined Joli-cœur. "But what they might do may we not do also? It will depend upon who returns first."

"*Pardie*, thou hast said well. It is we who will return with horses and men, and secure the treasure!" exclaimed Raimond, joyfully.

When they came to lower the boxes into the river, they found the water so clear that they were in plain view; so they hoisted them up again into the boat, rowed down stream to a spot where overhanging trees shaded the water and obscured the sandy bottom of the river. There they again lowered the chests, to which were attached strong chains, looped in such a manner that they could be easily raised by the means of a hooked staff. They marked the spot, and then proceeded on their way, each with two small bags of gold at his feet in the bottom of the boat, and with their pouches filled with gems.

Several days later they heard that a skirmish had recently taken place in the vicinity between the English and the Gascons, and that the Gascons had

proved the better men. The victors had taken the road toward Limoges, which had just capitulated to Sir Bertrand du Guesclin. They heard at the same time of the death of the gallant Sir John Chandos, that wise and able general to whom England owed her brilliant victories at Poitiers, Auray, and Najarra, rather than to the Black Prince, in whom tradition has concentrated all the grace, wisdom, valor, and virtue of that chivalric age. After the death of this knight, nearly all the territory acquired in France by Edward III. was lost, and the former succession of brilliant victories turned to a succession of humiliating defeats.

It is to Froissart that we owe the touching account of the death of the English knight, Sir John Chandos, whose memory will always be hallowed in England, not less honored than that of the prince he served so loyally.

"These barons and knights of Poitiers," writes Froissart, "were struck with grief when they saw their seneschal, Sir John Chandos, lying in so doleful a way, and not able to speak. They began grievously to lament his loss, saying: 'Flower of knighthood! oh, Sir John Chandos! cursed be the forging of that lance which wounded thee and which has thus ended thy life!' Those who were around the body most tenderly bewailed him; while he heard and answered with groans, but could not articulate a word. They wrung their hands and tore their hair, uttering cries and complaints, more especially those who belonged to his household.

"Sir John Chandos was disarmed very gently by his own servants, laid upon shields and targets and carried at a foot's pace to Mortemer, the nearest fort to that place where they were."

The death of Sir John was a serious blow to the English interests, especially as Charles V. was a man to take advantage of every opportunity. Unlike his father, King John, Charles V. was a politic statesman, and did not depend upon personal prowess, gallantry, or courage to defeat the English, but had laid his plans far in advance. First, he had won all the old allies from the English king by patient adroitness and the judicious bestowal of fiefs. Also, he had secured the services of a man in whom he recognized all the characteristics of a military leader, the Breton knight, Sir Bertrand du Guesclin. Edward III. had sent two armies into France, which met with little success, as the French did not give them battle, but contented themselves with holding and defending all the fortified places in their possession, leaving the open country to the mercy of the English. This kind of waiting warfare is always hardest on the invader, and Edward's armies had been unable to repeat the victories of Créci and Poitiers, where the chivalry of France had twice been laid low.

At the time of the Gascon uprising, Sir Bertrand du Guesclin was in Spain, having been aided by the French king in the payment of his ransom to the Black Prince, where he had helped Henry of Transtamare again to defeat his brother, and to re-establish himself permanently on the Castilian throne. Charles V. had sent for him to return to take an important command, and henceforth Sir Bertrand was

to Charles V. what Sir John Chandos had been to Edward III., leading the warriors of France to victory where before they had sustained defeat.

Raimond learned that the gallant Breton knight was at Limoges, which had been recently surrendered to him under most favorable conditions. It was a most important conquest, for the Black Prince regarded this city as the gateway to France, considering its possession even more desirable than the friendship and alliance of Charles le Mauvais. When the King of Navarre had signified that the price of his aid was the viscounty of Limoges, the Black Prince, though deeming his alliance almost necessary to his success, refused thus to break into his kingdom of Aquitaine. Now it had been taken from him without any return either in service or gold, and he swore that he would get the city back and make the traitors pay dear for their surrender to the Breton knight.

But at present the inhabitants of Limoges were secure, for the Breton knight was still encamped before its walls. Therefore, thither Raimond, attended by Joli-cœur, made his way. They were challenged every once in a while, but Raimond evaded detention, as he still wore his friar's frock; while Joli-cœur's motley garb was hidden under the folds of a long cloak.

The army was a large one, but Raimond had no difficulty in entering the camp; the difficulty would

come in getting out safely if he failed in satisfying the commander of his loyalty and good intentions. He asked to be conducted to the knight's tent. When his business was inquired into, he was mysterious in his replies.

"My lord commander has weighty matters on hand; he cannot see every varlet or begging friar who would crave of his bounty," replied one of the guards, testily.

"'Tis not thy duty to decide whom thy lord will see or will not see," responded Raimond, coolly. "'Tis my business to see him, and see him I will."

"'Twere easy enough to see him," replied the guard, mockingly. "My lord commander makes no secrecy of his person. He will walk abroad, no doubt, when it suits his convenience."

"Then will I wait till he comes forth, when I will speak to him."

"'Twere easy to see him, aye to speak with him, but to get him to see thee or speak to thee were another matter."

Raimond, however, was not to be so easily daunted. By dint of perseverance, persistence, and effrontery, he at length found himself with Joli-cœur at his heels in front of the knight's tent. Farther he could not go. He narrowly escaped arrest, for by this time his design was suspected to be one against the life of the knight; the dwarf also excited distrust. Two of the guards had already seized Rai-

mond, when to his bewilderment and delight whom should the latter see emerge from the tent of the Breton knight but Sir Gaston d'Ambricicourt, whom he had supposed to be dead and buried.

"My lord! My lord!" shrieked Raimond.

CHAPTER X.

BACK TO BOCASSE.

At Raimond's almost frantic cry, the Gascon knight stopped and looked with displeased astonishment at the individual who was calling upon him so lustily for aid, as he supposed, and who presented so mean an appearance in his dirty friar's frock. As he caught sight of the face, he recognized his squire, and coming quickly forward, demanded of the two guards what they were about to do with this young gentleman.

The guards then had their share of astonishment at seeing so great a knight as Sir Gaston d'Ambricicourt, a friend of Sir Bertrand, espousing the cause of these two vagrants, who had shown more daring and insolence than prudence and wisdom. They reluctantly released their prisoners, casting contemptuous glances at the dirty-frocked youth, whose cowl was pulled down over one eye in a manner that was more rakish than clerical, and at the squat little figure covered with a long cloak and whose eyes fairly glared at them from under the pointed hood stuck sideways upon his head.

"Sir Gaston!" again shrieked Raimond; and with a spring and a kick and a toss, he flung himself out of his gown, and stood before the Gascon knight in his bloodstained doublet and mud-stained hose.

"My Raimond, I thought thou hadst been killed!" exclaimed Sir Gaston.

"No more dead than yourself, my lord," replied Raimond, joyously. "I thought I had left you buried beneath a heap of dead men-at-arms. What miracle enabled you to escape?"

"Come to my tent; thy companion may follow," said Sir Gaston.

When they reached the tent, the knight motioned to Joli-cœur to remain outside, much to the dwarf's dismay, and who seized Raimond's arm, crying:

"No, no, my lord, you must not part us! He has bound himself to me!"

"*Parbleu*, and who mayst thou be?" asked Sir Gaston, angrily.

"Who knows, my lord, what he is, or may become, or whither he may go?" replied Joli-cœur, coolly.

Sir Gaston looked significantly at Raimond.

"He is a simple one," said the knight.

"No, my lord; truly he is a wise one. If my lord will permit, he will tell you many things worth hearing," replied the youth.

"Come hither, then."

They entered the tent. Sir Gaston seated himself

in a large chair, pointing toward some wild animal skins whereon for Raimond and Joli-cœur to seat themselves.

"Now relate how it was thou wert not killed at St. Arnaud."

"Pardon, my lord, 'tis a long tale. Will not you inform us how you escaped first; after will I relate my experience from beginning to end."

"*Soit.* I fell, as thou knowest, in the market-place, and was no doubt left for dead. How long I lay there I have no means of telling, but my first sensation was that of cold. When I opened my eyes it was dark, the rain was falling briskly, and the air was heavy with the smell of damp, charred wood. At first, I could move neither hand nor foot, for many bodies lay above me, and my head alone was free. By slow degrees and much painful effort, I managed first to free an arm and then a leg, and finally both arms and both legs. I was badly cut, but the blood had ceased flowing, though my efforts to move started one of my wounds to bleed anew. I succeeded after many hours, it seemed to me, in dragging myself under the shelter of a projecting window, where I lay till daylight. At dawn there came a flock of human carrion to prey upon the dead. They soon discovered me, and would have stripped me also, living as I was, had I not promised them a large reward if they would remove me to a place where I could receive care and nursing till my

wounds were healed. They took me to the house of one of the chief magistrates, which had been sacked but not burned. Some of the servants still remained, and these did for me until their master returned. My wounds were some time in healing. I have but just arrived at Sir Bertrand's camp to offer him my services, for he is high in the king's favor. Now for thy tale."

Raimond then told Sir Gaston how he had hidden himself in the abbey, how he had disguised himself in the garb of a mendicant friar, and journeyed on foot to Bocasse. How he had found the castle invested by an English company, and fearing for his lady's safety, had started to procure reinforcements. He was interrupted by Sir Gaston, who springing from his chair, exclaimed vehemently:

"*Sangdieu!* We will go to her aid at once!" Then he sank back dejectedly in his chair and leaned his head upon his hand. "*Hélas!*" he muttered, "it is I who have no money to pay a company, and whom could I expect to accompany me without promise of payment, and something down as a warranty that more will be forthcoming! I must appeal to Sir Bertrand."

Raimond was already on his feet and detaching one of the bags from his belt, poured its contents on the table in front of the astonished knight. Then Joli-cœur also arose and emptied one of his bags of

gold on the table, so that two heaps of shining gold pieces lay before Sir Gaston.

"*Nom du diable!*" he exclaimed. "Where have you found so much gold?"

"Where there yet remains many times as much," replied Joli-cœur, sententiously.

Sir Gaston eyed the dwarf with increasing favor. The sight of the gold had impressed him, and his respect for Joli-cœur had grown accordingly, for he knew Raimond could not have acquired so much gold unaided. Then he hastily crossed himself and shivered. Could it be possible the misshapen creature was indeed the Evil One, who was seeking his soul as well as Raimond's?

The boy was putting the gold back into the bags. When he had finished, he handed them to Sir Gaston, saying:

"If my lord will but listen to the end of my tale he will see that there is no need to appeal to any one for aid so long as men-at-arms may be had for hire."

Then he told how he was obliged to take a circuitous route back in order to avoid capture by the English, who might have taken him for a spy, and how he had heard the cries of Joli-cœur, and had responded to them without thinking of the consequences, which had turned out to be so lucky for them all, as the treasure that remained behind was great, and which he believed they would be able to secure.

At first Sir Gaston was for journeying at once to

the rocky fortress to secure the treasure before the others had time to return; but Raimond protested, saying that by this time the inhabitants of Bocasse might be reduced to dire extremity.

"We will succor the lady first," declared Sir Gaston, "and secure the treasure after."

He told Raimond and Joli-cœur to remain in the tent while he again sought Sir Bertrand, this time to ask for a large company of men-at-arms to go to the aid of Château de Bocasse.

With money to pay for their services, Sir Gaston had no difficulty in hiring a band of mercenaries to take to the relief of the Maid of Bocasse. He lost no time; the men were told to be ready to depart the following morning. Horses were procured, as Sir Gaston offered a good price, and many a knight made a fair penny by selling dear to the Gascon knight and buying cheap of the peasants, scouring the neighborhood for a fresh supply. By mounting his men, Sir Gaston calculated upon reaching Bocasse on the evening of the fourth day. No accidents interfering, his expectations were realized; and just as the sun was sinking below the hills on the fourth day they came in sight of the town and castle of Bocasse.

What was the consternation of Sir Gaston and Raimond to see the banner of Bocasse no longer floating to the breeze; neither was there any army investing its walls; instead, an ugly breach yawned

to the north of the gate, a breach which some attempt had been made to patch up. He camped his men in the woods on the brow of the hill overlooking the town, wishing to keep his arrival concealed for the present. Raimond volunteered to seek information in the town. Sir Gaston gladly gave his consent. The boy made his way through the fire-blackened streets to the house of the chief magistrate, which, being built of stone, had survived the torch; and there he learned the manner in which the château had been taken, of the departure of the Lady of Bocasse and her women, accompanied by Messire de Bonciel and a small remnant of the garrison, and how the captain of the guard had returned some days later, saying that they had been pursued, overtaken, and the Lady Yvette carried off. Messire de Bonciel had then departed northward to seek redress for his lady from her liege, the King of Navarre.

As Raimond was slowly and sorrowfully making his way back to camp, whom should he meet but Martin.

"Ah, damoiseau, where have you come from? And why did you wait until the town was burned, the château taken, and its lady captured, before coming back?"

"We had expected to succor her," replied Raimond, sadly. "But come with me; Sir Gaston, no doubt, would have speech with thee."

"With me? And why?"

"Yes, with thee; for thou canst tell him all that has happened since we left."

"In truth, yes. Who could do it better?"

When Sir Gaston learned that the castle had been taken by means of a mine, he quickly decided that what had been done once could be done again. He questioned Martin closely regarding the number of the garrison, and learned that it was comparatively small, as Sir Hugh had departed after the capture with a large number of men and with a long train of sumpter horses heavily laden with the wealth of Bocasse. The knight quickly formulated his plan of attack.

"Canst thou tell me the location of the beginning of the mine," asked Sir Gaston of Martin.

"That I can readily," replied the peasant. "If messire wills, I can take him hither this very night. The moon is full, and the way not to be mistaken."

"It is well. We will reconnoitre as soon as daylight disappears."

Some hours later a small party of men made their way cautiously to the castle walls, keeping as much as possible under the shade of the trees to avoid detection by the sentries that, no doubt, were posted in the turrets. The entrance to the mine was easily found. They entered it; and once inside, lighted, by means of a flint, their pine torches soaked in pitch, and traversed the underground passage. It

stopped at the place where the walls had been thrown down.

"We will carry the mine farther," said Sir Gaston, "until it shall enter the inner court; then will one division under Raimond enter by these means, while I, with the other, will storm the breach."

They began the work of continuing the mine the following evening, and labored all that night and most of the next day, as Martin privately secured the services of all the peasants in the vicinity, having them assemble after dark near the entrance of the mine, which the garrison put in charge of the château had not thought it necessary to guard, on account of the breach in the walls where watch was maintained day and night.

About four o'clock in the afternoon Martin reported to Sir Gaston that he thought they had undermined the inner wall, and asked for further instructions.

"Thou hast done thy part," replied the knight. "Do not let thy men depart until we are there, so that we may be able to enter directly, before the garrison have time to expect us."

In the course of an hour the sentries in the turrets of the château were surprised and alarmed at seeing a large company of mounted men-at-arms ride up before the walls.

Approaching the gate, the Gascon knight blew his horn.

Straightway the head of the warder appeared in the little tower above the gateway, and demanded whom he sought. "The Lady of Bocasse," replied the knight, haughtily.

"There is none as yet," said the warder. "The castle belongs to my lord of Beverly, who has not yet given it a lady."

"*Nom du diable!*" shouted Sir Gaston. "Neither thou nor thy lord shall remain therein long enough for that! Surrender at once, else will I take the castle and hang every one of you from its walls."

"To hang us, you must first get us!" retorted the warder. "The garrison is strong, the walls thick, and the food plenty; therefore will we wait."

"Storm the breach!" shouted Sir Gaston, leading the assault across the still encumbered moat.

The besieged made a gallant defence. They depended upon the second wall, should the enemy prove too strong for them. A small company was put in charge of the inner gate; their arrangements for retreat would have been successful had it not been for the second attacking party, that made an entrance into the inner court by means of the mine while the garrison were defending the outer walls. The fight was a short one, for the garrison yielded as soon as they saw their cause was hopeless, being attacked as they were front and rear.

Sir Gaston made short shrift of Sir Hugh's men, turning them out to find their master as best they

could without a *denier* in their pouch or a weapon to their hand, and no other habiliments than the clothes they stood in. Men were not squeamish in those days of chivalry except in that which they thought affected their honor.

It was not with unalloyed satisfaction that Sir Gaston contemplated the possession of Château de Bocasse. He could not leave the castle in charge of but a portion of his company while the breach remained open, and to repair it effectually would take some time.

Both he and Raimond were eager to proceed in quest of the rest of the treasure in the rocky fortress in Guienne, so one day Raimond proposed to go in search of his uncle. No doubt he would be wherever the King of Navarre was, and that would be no great difficulty to discover. On finding him, he would bring him back to Bocasse, the garrison could be reinforced, and Sir Gaston could take his own company, or a part of it, to La Roque de Tayac and secure the treasure.

This plan commended itself to Sir Gaston. After the treasure was theirs they would ransom Lady Yvette, who would then be restored to her own.

Raimond departed the next day with an escort of mounted men-at-arms, accompanied also by Jolicœur, who absolutely refused to be separated from him. Once on the journey, the dwarf told Raimond that he had accompanied him with the object of find-

ing the Lady of Bocasse. Sir Hugh had formerly been his lord; it was he who had consigned him to the late leader of the band of freebooters who had their headquarters at La Roque. He knew all the principal castles owned by Sir Hugh in France; he would travel from one to another until he succeeded in finding the imprisoned lady. As a jester he would have greater freedom of action than would another man, and many of his actions would pass unnoticed, or at least unchallenged.

"But Sir Hugh will recognize thee; then thy life will not be worth a *denier*," said Raimond.

"He will not recognize me unless I so will it, nor any of his household," returned Joli-cœur, confidently.

Raimond was too anxious to have him begin his search for the Lady Yvette to make further objection. With Joli-cœur in quest of his lady, his uncle in charge of Bocasse, and he and Sir Gaston after the treasure, the youth felt that things could not be better arranged.

Joli-cœur parted company with Raimond and his escort at the first large town at which they arrived, remaining there while the others pursued their journey.

Raimond was anxious to get northward as quickly as possible, but what was his surprise and delight to encounter his uncle at one of the inns where they stopped for the night. Messire de Bonciel, who had

not recovered from his wounds when he started on his journey, had taken cold and had been seized with a fever, greatly to the distress of his mind, for all the while he did not know what was happening to his lady. He was overjoyed at the news of the recapture of Bocasse, but Raimond had some difficulty in persuading him to return to the castle without finding Lady Yvette, for he had no faith in the services of the dwarf, whom he had never seen and in whom he placed no confidence.

Raimond supplied his uncle with gold enough for his needs till he reached Bocasse, as well as to buy a horse and to engage several men-at-arms to take with him to reinforce the garrison. Then he begged his uncle to request Sir Gaston to depart at once and to meet him at Nérac, whence they could travel in company to Guienne. His great anxiety was to secure the treasure. That secured, the rescue of Lady Yvette would soon follow; for gold unlocked prison doors and made hard roads easy to travel. Should the Lady Yvette be held for ransom, they would have the gold wherewith to pay it at once; should her freedom be refused, they would have enough to engage a whole army to effect her rescue.

The time spent in Bocasse dragged heavily to Sir Gaston. In the strife of battle, in the excitement of conflict, the bewitching face of Lady Yvette, with its sweet lips and mocking eyes, sometimes ceased to haunt him. But at Bocasse that lovely face peered

at him from every side; sometimes it was enchanting in its sweetness and softness, sometimes it mocked him with its laughing scorn; but always lovely, bewitching, and altogether desirable.

"But where is she now?" Then he clinched his fists, and looked about him for something to try their hardness on. "Suppose Sir Hugh should desire to possess her also? She would not believe him to be seeking her domain rather than her peerless self. Him will I hunt the world over and lay his head low in the dust, and thus prove myself the better knight! I'll tilt with him before her very eyes, and show proud madame that there are other things than a lady's favor!"

But his anger soon died out, to leave the longing behind all the stronger, and glad enough was he when Messire de Bonciel at length arrived at Bocasse and delivered Raimond's message. He set out immediately for Nérac, though now he would have preferred to have set out in quest of Sir Hugh.

In due time he and his goodly company of men-at-arms reached Nérac. Acting upon Raimond's advice, Sir Gaston engaged several joiners, who were to carry with them material for strong ladders. He also purchased a number of sumpter-mules, that would serve for the double purpose of conveying the material for the ladders to La Roque and bringing away the treasure when they had secured it. Then he had also to procure a large flat-bottomed boat to

convey the company across the river, which was too deep to ford, particularly for the heavily laden mules.

They travelled principally at night, as Sir Gaston did not care to excite curiosity or conjecture as to his destination. When they arrived at the river bank, on the opposite side to the fortress, not a sign of human life was visible. The face of the high cliffs looked as inscrutable as that of a sphinx. They made their preparation to cross by daybreak. As soon as dawn began to appear, Sir Gaston and Raimond, with half a dozen men-at-arms, were ferried across the river. They entered the lower chamber of the rocky fortress, which seemed to Raimond exactly as he and Joli-cœur had left it a fortnight or so before.

"They have not yet returned!" exclaimed the youth, joyfully. "Come, let us see if our chests of gold remain where we put them." On repairing to the spot, Raimond lowered his lance; it struck against something that gave back a metallic sound. "They're all safe, at least. No, they have not returned. We have arrived in time."

Going back into the rock-hewn chamber, Sir Gaston hallooed, and challenged any who might be in hiding to appear. But no sound came in answer to his shouts save the hollow reverberations of the cavernous chamber. Then he bade his ferrymen return after the joiners and their partially constructed ladder, and tell the remaining men-at-arms to hold

themselves in readiness to cross when he should give the signal.

It took some hours to fasten the sections of the ladder securely together, so that they might mount to the upper chambers. Then the joiners erected a kind of derrick with which to lower the treasure from above. When everything was ready, Sir Gaston signalled for half of his men to come over to him, and then would have led the way himself. But Raimond claimed this privilege. Had he not discovered the place? Sir Gaston yielded good-humoredly, and the agile boy quickly scampered up the ladder. The men-at-arms stood grouped around it, ready to ascend, Sir Gaston was already half-way up, all with faces turned upward, when Raimond came tumbling down upon them much faster than he went up; for no sooner had he put his head above the floor of the upper chamber than he was hurled violently down. Had not his comrades caught him, he must have been badly injured by falling heavily on the stone floor in his coat of mail.

CHAPTER XI.

AT SAINT BRICE.

THE soldiers' quarters at St. Brice were all stir, bustle, and excitement, for Sir Hugh de Beverly had just returned with a part of his company from a very successful predatory expedition, and was therefore in a very amiable humor, which meant good rations and plenty of them, money to gamble with, and mummer and juggler shows for entertainment.

It was the supper hour, and the soldiers were assembled in the long dreary apartment where they took their meals. It being the season of the year when darkness comes early and stays long, the chamber was lighted by torches made of sheaves of straw soaked in pitch, that threw fitful, garish gleams over the men seated about the big board, whose faces proclaimed them to be of various nationalities, and whose features bore evidence of rough living, hard fighting, and low thinking. While there remained food and drink before them on the table, there was little heard save such sounds as beasts make when feeding, the thump of pewter tankards on the bare boards, the scraping of platters, and the calls for

more food and drink. Belts were loosened, and men were sighing because they could not eat more, when a gruff, heavy voice called out from one end of the table:

"This last enterprise has been a lucky one."

"Tell us of it," said one of the garrison.

"Well, we descended upon the town at dawn, its fortifications were mere shells, which we already knew, for Sir Hugh's gold had been at work inside the town. Our company was a big one, and when we appeared before the walls there was great consternation inside, the inhabitants flocked to the highest parts of the town and looked down upon us in fear. Sir Hugh caused a herald to be sent to the gates to say that Sir Hugh would speak with the magistrate. A few minutes later he appeared on the wall near the principal gate. Then Sir Hugh spake out big and bold: 'Give me fifty thousand francs,' said he, 'or the town shall be delivered to the sack!'"

The men nodded their heads in approval of Sir Hugh's methods.

"'You shall have our reply at sunset,' replied the chief magistrate.

"'Every hour you delay shall cost you ten thousand francs more,' quoth Sir Hugh.

"'It will take much time to collect so great a sum,' said the chief magistrate.

"'If it be not in my hand at midday, by nightfall

there shall not be left one stone upon another in all the town,' quoth Sir Hugh."

"And did he get the money?" asked one of the younger men, eagerly.

"That was a question of a fool," grunted the first speaker. "Gold would melt in purgatory, even if we men might take it with us."

"*Sangdieu!* but it was a bigger haul we got from the caravan, I'm thinking," said another. "I caught sight of some of the gold and jewels and plate and trinkets. No doubt the table of Sir Hugh is even now spread with gold and silver drinking-cups and platters and bowls; while pewter is good enough for us!" he growled.

"Aye, or iron, or wood, or anything else, 'tis all the same to me so long as there's plenty to fill them. 'Tis drink and victuals that is the main thing, not what holds them," replied another, philosophically.

"*Mordieu,* anything's good enough for a foreigner!" muttered the complainer.

There was a threatening demonstration among the foreigners at these words that boded violence. But one of the older men interposed, saying diplomatically:

"Have you heard? There is to be a great banquet to-morrow in honor of Sir Hugh's return, and after the banquet a juggler is going to do some wonderful things, and we are to have him perform for us also."

"That's so," chimed in another; "and there's also

a Moor, whatever that may be, but he's black, and they say he is a great magician and has travelled all over the earth, and has been in far countries where horrible monsters dwell, that he has seen men with heads like dogs, and others whose faces are in their breasts beneath their shoulders, and horses that speak, and animals so big that they could swallow a man in one gulp."

The men crossed themselves. Such accomplishments could not be Christian.

In one of the apartments of St. Brice overlooking the inner court, sat Lady Yvette, a prisoner, though well attended and her material wants well provided for. It was nearly a month since Sir Hugh had brought her to this place, telling her she should remain there either as his prisoner or his bride. She had elected to remain as his prisoner, taking no pains to conceal her aversion toward her abductor and suitor.

To resist, even to fight, suited very well the temper of the Maid of Bocasse, but not to endure. She rose, she ate, she slept. Waking, eating, sleeping, were all she did; no, not all—she thought—thought of her dead parents, thought of her home, thought of her people, thought of her discarded lover. She wondered how Nurse Alinore fared; perhaps she had died of fright and grief. She wondered if Messire de Bonciel had been killed by his fall, or if he also were a prisoner—perhaps he was a prisoner in this

very castle! She wondered if Raimond would return to Bocasse, and if Sir Gaston d'Ambricicourt would ever learn of her ill fortune. She wondered if she were doomed to end her days in the fortress of St. Brice. She wondered if the dungeon was to be her fate if she persisted in her refusal to marry the Lord of St. Brice, or perhaps the torture chamber, horrible thought!

She knew of nothing that transpired without the four walls of her chamber. Sir Hugh she had not seen since the second day of her imprisonment, when he had told her as soon as she was ready to marry him to send him some token, a ribbon, a jewel, a trifle of any sort. In vain she addressed questions to the waiting-woman appointed to attend her; the only answers she received were nods and shakes of the head.

About a month after her capture, the waiting-woman brought in a chest, which she placed before Lady Yvette. Opening it, she took therefrom various articles of elegant wearing apparel, indicating by signs that the lady was to attire herself therein.

"Why should I take that trouble?" inquired Lady Yvette. "Who sees me here?"

The girl made no reply.

"Speak!" demanded Lady Yvette. "I shall do nothing unless I know the reason therefor."

The girl regarded her with a look of mute protest, such a look as one receives from a pet animal when

it feels itself misunderstood. Then she turned away without a word, though Lady Yvette thought she saw tears in her eyes.

She sprang toward the girl, and seizing her by the shoulders, cried:

"Speak, I command you! I am weary of your contumacy."

Again the girl gave her that mute, protesting look; then after an instant's pause, while Lady Yvette's eyes, flashing with anger, were fixed upon her, she opened her mouth and pointed within. Then Lady Yvette understood the reason for her silence. Her tongue had been cut out!

"My poor, poor child!" cried the lady. And she took her in her strong young arms, and held her close to her, pressing her cheek against hers, and caressing her as she would have caressed her favorite dog Niniche.

Later on, she was told that Sir Hugh had taken a fancy to Jeanne-Marie, who had been a pretty, light-hearted, and vivacious girl. He had singled her out from the rest of the women of the household, and had shown her great favor. He had associated her with himself, given her apartments near his own; at meals her chair was placed near his. He had given her rich raiment, jewels, and attendants. Then either he had wearied of her, or grown suspicious of her, for he discarded her for no apparent cause, putting her back among the domestics. But this hu-

miliation was not all. One day a projected scheme of his was talked about in the castle. It came to Sir Hugh's ears. He accused Jeanne-Marie of having betrayed his former confidences. She denied it, but her denial and reproaches seemed only to inflame his anger the more. He swore that she would never betray another secret, and calling two attendants to hold her, he with his dagger cut out the poor girl's tongue.

Whether he had selected Jeanne-Marie to wait upon her because he considered she would present a salutary example to his prisoner, or whether because she could not answer questions, Lady Yvette could not conjecture.

However, the Maid of Bocasse was not to be intimidated, coaxed, or cajoled. She took counsel with herself. To wear away her life in solitary confinement was not an agreeable prospect, even if Sir Hugh's vengeance did not take a severer form. Why not temporize? A woman's wit ought to be a match for a man's will. Were she allowed the range of the castle, she might effect her escape. Evidently the advent of this handsome apparel was the precursor of a visit from the lord of the castle.

The result of these reflections was that she concluded to conform to the wishes of Sir Hugh up to a certain point. Therefore, she examined the contents of the chest, and found them to be all that was necessary to clothe herself anew and sumptuously.

The long flowing robe was of dark-blue silk, cut square in the neck, and embroidered with gold thread, and was confined about the waist with the golden girdle she wore at the time of her abduction, and from which was suspended her embroidered pouch and golden-hilted dagger.

Sir Hugh was very agreeably disappointed at his gracious reception when he presented himself an hour or so later. He had expected to prosper his wooing by threats; by force, if needs be, just as he would take a castle or town.

At his very best, Sir Hugh was not a pleasant person to look upon, and to-day he impressed Lady Yvette as even more repulsive in appearance than before. As usual, he was dressed in bright crimson, that deepened the red of his hair and the flush of his face. Involuntarily did she compare him with Sir Gaston as first she beheld him in his suit of crimson and gold, how like some noble prince he appeared; while this creature who stood before her seemed like some churl masquerading in a knight's apparel.

He advanced toward her with the ungraceful gait of one who spends much of his life in the saddle, saying in his big gruff voice:

"Ha! ha! Dear my lady, has solitude made thee more amiable?"

"Dear my lord," replied she, recoiling a little in spite of herself before his advance, "'tis not my

amiability that is at fault," with a little emphasis on the last "my."

"Still untamed! Will it require the dungeon to tame thy proud spirit?"

"A woman without spirit, my lord, is like wine without sparkle."

"*Mordieu*, that was well said!" responded the red knight, slapping his broad thigh in appreciation. "A woman, like a horse, is all the better for spirit; but both must yield before a master."

"But every horse and every woman may not find the master."

"I have yet to stride the horse I cannot subdue, and to see the woman I may not conquer."

"My lord thinks well of his powers," she answered a little mockingly.

"And with reason," he replied with decision. Then he continued: "Come now, sweet lady, we'll be a well-mated pair. Thou'lt yield only to me; every one else shall do thy bidding. After mine, thy word shall be law, thy will be accomplished; no lady shall be more quickly obeyed; no lady shall have more splendid raiment and jewels. *Sangdieu*, but I am accommodating! 'Tis thyself who shall set the day and hour for us to kneel together before the altar."

"But my lord's wooing has been unmannerly. 'Tis not the way to win a woman's love to force her will."

"*Nom du diable!* A woman's love is to be had for the asking, often without it. 'Tis a quarry that flies to the falcon, rather than from it," he answered indifferently.

"Then why, Sir Knight, do you seek mine, if a woman's love be of so light import and so easily won?"

"Have I asked thee for thy love? 'Tis thyself I would have. Thy love—oh, that will come!"

"A thing worth the having is worth the getting. If my lord would have me, let him first win my favor."

She looked so desirable with that saucy, mocking smile curving her lips, the flush of excitement tingeing her cheeks, the light of combat flashing from her eyes, that something stirred the knight's bosom that was other than a mere sense of attraction.

"And why should I not please thee?" he asked bluntly. "Am I not a knight of renown, known for deeds of prowess? Am I not possessed of fiefs and wealth of all kinds? What is there lacking in me? Why should not I win a lady's favor as well as another? Have I not done so already many times?"

"I know not, my lord, what is lacking in you, save that you do not please me," answered Lady Yvette, coolly. She had measured her antagonist, and had discovered his weakness. He admired her, her very independence having attracted him. He

had ceased wishing merely to dominate her; he wished now to impress her.

"*Mordieu*, but thou art bold!" he exclaimed admiringly. It was an entirely new experience; the opposition he met acted as a stimulus to his fancy. It was like subduing a mettlesome steed or the excitement of the chase. "And will good my lady deign to say wherein I fail to please her?" he asked.

She regarded him critically for a few seconds in silence, her head turned a little to one side and tilted slightly back, her lids lowered as if to narrow her visual range and thus concentrate it.

"My lord has red hair," she began categorically.

"*Nom du diable!* May a man choose the color of his hair?" roared the knight, angrily.

"There are compensations for red hair," slowly mused aloud the daring girl, without removing her gaze from his face.

"*Par les cornes du diable!* And what might they be?" he asked in tones that were but slightly moderated in loudness and lessened in volume.

"A gentle temper, my lord," she responded dispassionately.

"Thou thyself hast not the temper of a saint," he retorted, wrathfully.

"My lord's tones are often too loud to be pleasant to the ear," she continued, critically.

"I will modulate them soft as a cooing dove to suit my lady's fancy," he said, ironically.

"Fair words might soften them. My lord might try and see," she suggested.

"Am I a *jongleur* to pick my words?" he asked contemptuously.

"To be a *jongleur*, my lord must not only pick his words but be of quick wit and good heart."

"You compare me, *me*, madame, the famous Red Knight, lord of many fiefs, to a *jongleur!*" he burst forth, springing toward her as if he would crush her in his brawny powerful red hands.

She did not flinch or withdraw her gaze. "My lord is choleric. Has the barber ever tried blood-letting, or recommended fasting?" she asked, solicitously.

Sir Hugh swore a mighty oath. Though almost beside himself with mortified rage, the coolness of the daring girl fascinated him, and he did something he was never known to do before—he controlled his temper. He wrathfully strode up and down the apartment with long steps, then approached Lady Yvette, and asked in as gentle tones as his gruff voice could assume:

"Tell me how I may please thee?"

Then did the girl tremble. To awaken his love would be worse than to arouse his hate. She turned white, and her eyes fell before his gaze. Her confusion rehabilitated him in his own good opinion, and in an instant he had assumed his usual dominant manner.

"I have come to conduct thee below," he said. "Art ready?"

"Yes, my lord; to see something more than these four walls will be a welcome change."

Taking her by the hand, he led her through the corridor down the great stairway to the banqueting hall.

Sir Hugh conducted his fair guest to the head of the table, and placed her in a chair next his own. The various members of the numerous household then ranged themselves according to their rank, the lowest in order sitting farthest from the head of the table; there were present the chief officers of the household, their wives and daughters, and the knights, squires, and pages of Sir Hugh's retinue.

It was observed by those nearest their lord that he did not eat and drink by half as much as usual. Much to their consternation he ordered the table cleared before many had satisfied their hunger. When Lady Yvette had ceased to eat, he motioned for the *serviteurs* to take away the food, and bade them summon the mummers. At first came a company of travelling players, or mummers, who enacted a mystery play, performed juggler tricks, acrobatic feats, and all kinds of buffoonries, to the satisfaction, wonderment, admiration, and amusement of the spectators. At length, when the Red Knight had had enough of their antics, they were sent off

to the courtyard to entertain the men-at-arms and the domestics. Then were brought more wine and cakes and sweets, and the knights and ladies drank and ate again. So often was Sir Hugh's tankard emptied that at length he became merry, and made jests at which his retainers laughed loudly; and the wine cups were emptied and filled, and again emptied and filled, and the hilarity of the company waxed greater and few were responsible for their actions. Some one called for the fiddlers, and when they came in, men seized the women and danced wildly about the hall. Chairs were overturned, raiment was torn, tempers grew uncertain, and a regular saturnalia was in progress. Farther and farther back in her chair shrank the Lady Yvette, her eyes distended in fright and her heart palpitating with apprehension. Sir Hugh applauded the performance vociferously.

"We also will dance," he exclaimed, seizing her by the hand.

She shrank from his touch.

Then he rudely jerked her up from her chair and putting his red face close to hers, hissed:

"I've had enough of thy coyness! Come, or——"

He did not finish his sentence, for Lady Yvette, thoroughly frightened, arose. Why had she ever consented to leave her room? She ought to have known that to play with edged tools is almost a sure way to cut oneself. As she rose, she cast a helpless,

hopeless glance about her. But the sight that met her eyes made her shudder. Suddenly she felt her dress pulled. Looking down, she found at her side a little squat figure all in black; even the fat round face that was turned upward to hers was black.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FIGHT FOR THE TREASURE.

It was a group of astonished men that stood gazing upward with staring eyes and gaping mouths when Raimond, hurled by some unseen force, came down headlong into their midst. Not a sound was to be heard save that of their own breathing; not a sign of any living thing save themselves was visible. They held counsel together. Some one proposed putting planks over the circular opening in the lower floor and to heap earth upon them, so that in case when they attempted another ascent others were thrown backward and downward, the force of the fall would be broken by the earth.

"There may be but one left in charge, as was Jolicœur," suggested Raimond. "If we follow one another quickly up the ladder, he will have no chance to throw us all; some will gain a foothold and be able to overpower him."

Again and again they mounted the ladder, every man among them taking his turn to mount first. But the result was always the same, and the most provoking part of it was that none could see the assailants.

They decided to rest as darkness approached, and made a pretence of departing, Sir Gaston sending away the joiners. Then they stretched themselves out on the floor, lying almost motionless, scarcely daring to breathe lest those above should discover their presence. They hoped to lull them into a sense of security so that they would sufficiently relax their vigilance to be taken by surprise. At midnight another attempt to ascend was cautiously made, and so noiselessly that Sir Gaston, who was ahead, already had a foot on the floor above, when he received a blow on the head that sent him crashing below, carrying down all those beneath him. Then the ladder was seized from above; but it was too long to be dragged through the opening, and became wedged; the blows of an axe were heard, and later the broken parts of the ladder were thrown down, causing a scampering below among the men to avoid being struck.

That settled it for the present at least. As soon as it was light Sir Gaston and his men withdrew across the river to the opposite bank. If they could not enter that rocky fortress, no one else should, swore Sir Gaston, even if they had to sit down before it all winter to guard it.

This idea, however, did not long commend itself to the Gascon knight, for he was neither patient nor long-suffering, qualities that were at a discount in the fourteenth century among men-at-arms. He

questioned Raimond closely as to the means of admitting air and light, and when the youth spoke of the round holes cut into the rock way above the river, hardly large enough to admit the body of a man, Sir Gaston struck his thigh with determination and declared:

"We will enter by means of them!"

So three more ladders were made, two of them being much longer than the first one, and these were put in position against the front of the freebooters' haunt. But the river proved deeper than they had provided for, so an extension was necessary, and another day was lost. At length, the ladders were again raised. This time they were long enough, and the preparations for another attack were completed. As the moon was bright, and there was danger lest a lookout observe the operations, it was decided to make a simultaneous attack at every vulnerable point—at each of the two circular openings in the face of the wall and inside as well.

Sir Gaston, being the largest man of the company, said he would direct the attack from within, taking with him the biggest men. Raimond was to have command of one of the scaling parties, and another squire of Sir Gaston's, Ludovic de Ganz by name, was to lead the other. As the attack of the different parties was to be made simultaneously, a low whistle was agreed upon as the signal.

Sir Gaston's being considered the most dangerous

point of attack, and as he had the shortest ladder to mount, it was decided he should not begin to ascend until the outside parties were half way up. The plan was followed. Sir Gaston succeeded in getting on the floor above, his men crowding after; but in an instant the wildest confusion ensued. The Gascon knight managed to push back those who were seeking to throw him down the hole, being supported in the rear by his followers, who pressed forward, carrying all in front of them. At the same time, Ludovic and Raimond and their followers squeezed through the openings in the wall unnoticed, for it was of pitchy darkness within. Soon the whole fortress rang with blows and shouts. None knew foe from friend. Once Raimond found himself seized about the body by powerful arms and raised high in the air, and was about to be hurled downward with crushing force, when a light flickered up from a torch that had been left below by the last man to ascend, and in its glare he distinguished Sir Gaston's face. Just in time was he to save himself from certain death by crying:

"Sir Gaston, stop! It is I, Raimond!"

"Cease fighting, and do not renew the combat unless attacked, or I give the word!" called out Sir Gaston in the darkness. Then he listened.

The attack was not renewed; and there they remained in darkness and silence until the first faint streaks of dawn stole dimly through the two round

openings overlooking the river. As Sir Gaston had conjectured, they had been fighting one another, for how long none could say. The wounded men were all their own. Not a trace of the enemy could be discovered. Soon after the beginning of the struggle the occupants of the chambered rock must have withdrawn to some interior apartment.

When daylight finally appeared they began the search for the holders of the fortress, but were continually losing themselves in a labyrinth of passages that in the end brought them back to the central apartment. It was as if they had the whole place to themselves.

They found chests in plenty, but they were empty, or else contained articles of small value that would not pay for the carrying away.

Sir Gaston worked himself up into a passion of fury; then, to the amazement of all, suddenly broke out into a roar of laughter.

"That was a lusty fight last night all among ourselves," he said, when he found his voice. "Ludovic, who gave thee that prick in the arm? Raimond, I swear! Raimond, thou wast thinking of saying thy last *ave* when I had thee in my arms," he chuckled. Then his mirth as suddenly changed to wrath. "*Nom du diable!* If I had but those rascally English!"

Meantime Raimond had been investigating on his own account. He tried to retrace step by step the

way he had traversed with Joli-cœur. What a fool he had been to permit him to go off on that wild-goose chase after the Lady of Bocasse! Why had he not insisted that he should remain with him and accompany them to this freebooters' haunt? Raimond was positive that there was yet another chamber, the storeroom for the gold and jewels, and the present hiding-place of the English, who, he felt assured, had not escaped them through any secret passage. He struck his spear against the wall, then listened. Again and again he struck the wall, high and low, this way and that. Once there was emitted a hollow sound. Evidently there was a chamber on the other side. Then he tried to find the entrance, but the wall was a blank one, without hole, crevice, or crack. He told Sir Gaston of his discovery, and led him to the place to listen while he struck the wall again. After listening, Sir Gaston set every unwounded man to work looking for the entrance. Once Raimond thought he heard a suppressed sneeze. All this made the knight the more determined to enter the hidden chamber.

By this time, however, they were ravenously hungry. Raimond was able, at least, to find the larder, so they were soon seated before a bountiful repast.

"In faith, one might starve the rascals out!" muttered Sir Gaston, with his mouth full of dried beef.

"'Twould be slow work and make weary waiting," returned Raimond.

"Smoke them out, my lord," suggested Ludovic.

"We might make the attempt," replied Sir Gaston, slowly; "but I doubt if smoke could be made to reach them."

"We'd lose naught by trying," said Ludovic, cheerfully.

So after they had satisfied their hunger and looked after their wounds (those who had any) they all descended the ladder, the wounded men being carried or helped down by their uninjured companions.

"We might have saved ourselves all this trouble," grumbled one of the wounded men.

"We might, but we didn't," replied Sir Gaston laconically.

They did not remove the ladders, but Sir Gaston stationed several men at the foot of them, also at the lower entrance, with orders to take any one who might attempt to descend the ladders or to emerge from the main entrance of the fortress. A quantity of green wood was gathered and carried across the river into the lower chamber. Some dried twigs were first piled in a heap and set on fire; as soon as they were burning briskly, the green wood was spread loosely on top, with draught enough to keep the fire going. It was not long before the chamber was full of smoke, and every one was obliged to seek the outer air on account of choking breath and smarting eyeballs. They carefully closed up the

opening into the chamber by putting their flat-bottomed boat over it.

Meanwhile the smoke poured forth in a thick cloud from the portholes above; but no sign of life made itself evident. Darkness came; still no indication of surrender. Sir Gaston was more than ever convinced that the English had made their escape by means of some concealed underground passage.

The moon rose. Suddenly there came a shout from the guard, and Sir Gaston could see several men in the act of descending the ladders, some of them in their haste losing their grasp and falling into the water. They had been smoked out at last.

Some of the men managed to escape by swimming away beneath the surface of the water, coming up to breathe too far away to be distinguished in the uncertain light of the moon. Two men, however, were caught, and were brought before Sir Gaston.

"How many were you?" asked the knight.

"Too many for you," replied one of them, defiantly.

The speaker was a young man, and rash; the other was older and more experienced, therefore less reckless of consequences. The latter murmured a few cautionary words to his companion, evidently in remonstrance. Then he regarded Sir Gaston as well as he could on account of his stinging eyeballs, and said:

"Our lives are worth more to us than all the treasure that cavern contains. Yet will we lose

them should we reveal the secret of its hiding-place in case we fall into the hands of the Red Knight. And how shall we escape his vengeance, for should he discover our lack of faith he would not die till he had first killed us!"

"If you do not reveal the hiding-place of the treasure before the moonbeams reach the valley beyond, you shall be bound and thrown into the river," said Sir Gaston. "Choose between the risk of the Red Knight's vengeance and the certainty of mine."

The younger man shut his mouth the tighter, while the elder said insinuatingly:

"Good Sir Knight, there is still another way—a way that will save our lives and give you two brave followers as well as the secret of the treasure. We serve for pay; it matters not in whose cause we fight so long as we have food and drink in our stomachs and gold in our pouches. I will tell you, Sir Knight, of the hidden entrance, if you will promise to take us into your service, where the Red Knight's vengeance cannot strike, and give us our share of the treasure."

"And what may be that which you deem your share?" asked Sir Gaston, suspiciously.

"The same as the rest of your men, no more, no less."

The Gascon knight was silent for a few moments.

"Who are you?" he at length asked.

"We have come from across the Rhine, and French

and English are alike to us. We are soldiers of fortune and serve him best who pays the most."

"*Parbleu!*" returned Sir Gaston, doubtfully. "And would betray one master for another for the sake of a crown more."

"Why have the Gascons revolted against their English lord, if not because they hope to get better treatment from his French majesty than from his English royal highness?" asked the German, with convincing logic.

"Thou art a shrewd one," replied Sir Gaston. "I will consider."

The end of it was that Sir Gaston promised to receive the two German men-at-arms into his service in return for the secret of the entrance into the treasure chamber. Were not all his men mercenaries, German and Italian, and would not any of them be willing to desert him at any moment should the enemy offer him more pay?

The spring that opened the door giving entrance into the treasure chamber proved to be in the floor instead of the wall. It was in a crevice between the rocks, and on pressing down, a square slab of stone was displaced, revealing another spring, which, on being pressed, turned an upright slab in the wall on pivots, and thus gave ingress into the inner room.

The Germans told Sir Gaston afterward that at the time of the attack there were only eight of them in the cave, the others not yet having returned.

They had not entertained the slightest doubt that the eight of them could defend the upper chamber against an attack, no matter how numerous the force might be. They had never imagined that any one would attempt to enter by the upper openings. The last attack had been a complete surprise, for they had taken it for granted that the enemy had withdrawn for the night. Still they kept watch, all being in the central chamber at the time of the night attack. When they found themselves attacked, as they were, front and back, they knew their safety lay in retreat and hiding. Under the cover of darkness, they opened the secret entrance to the strong room and quietly withdrew, every once in a while one of them putting his head to the door and shouting "Beverly!" at the top of his voice. As they had hoped, the enemy had fallen to fighting among themselves in the darkness and confusion. They had expected to wear out the patience of their foe, for they had an ample supply of provisions in the treasure chamber. At first the smoke had not reached them; in time, however, it seemed actually to penetrate the porous limestone walls. When the air became so black that it was painful to breathe, they had opened the spring door, hoping to obtain fresh air from the portholes. But the smoke in the outer chambers was more dense and stifling than in the inner chamber, and it was with the greatest difficulty that they managed to reach the openings in

the walls. Finding the ladders there, they had descended them, hoping to escape by reason of the river and darkness.

The rock chambers were duly divested of all their treasure. A third of it was distributed among the company, Sir Gaston took another third, the remaining portion was put aside for the ransom of the Maid of Bocasse. Raimond's share was the gold and jewels contained in the sunken chests, enough to pay for his outfit as a knight when he should become one, and to equip him for many a tilt and tourney with the splendor so dear to a knight's heart.

CHAPTER XIII.

MAHMOUD THE MOOR.

At any other time Lady Yvette would probably have regarded the round black face turned up toward hers with both fear and aversion, for never before had she set eyes on a black man; but with such horror did Sir Hugh's touch inspire her that she scarcely gave the appearance of the dwarf a thought.

"Trust to me, madame," he whispered in French, but with a strange accent. "I will aid you, madame. Suffer yourself to be conducted thither by Sir Hugh, but be in readiness to follow me should anything happen."

This was said so quickly that Lady Yvette had time neither to be surprised nor to answer. She followed Sir Hugh passively as he led her from the head of the table into that part of the apartment occupied by the whirling, prancing, antic-cutting dancers. Soon Mahmoud joined in with the dancers, and made such a comical sight with his awkward motions and his long robe clinging about his legs and threatening to trip him up at every step, that several of the hilarious company paused in their

gyrations to look and laugh at him. But he pushed one here and another there, pulled at a third, and jostled against still another, and becoming entangled in the flowing skirts of one of the women, threw her to the floor. Her sudden fall in the path of others of the dancers threw them also. Mahmoud the Moor, making an apparently desperate effort to extricate himself, fell against Sir Hugh, who gave him a kick that sent him sprawling on top of the struggling heap of prostrate dancers. But the little black man regained his feet, and projecting his head and shoulders between the Red Knight's knees, by a dexterous twist of his body succeeded in bringing him down also. Quick as thought, Mahmoud extricated himself from the tumbled mass of humanity, and seizing Lady Yvette by the hand, said in low tones:

"Quick, madame! Follow me!"

He half led her, half dragged her to the upper end of the apartment, and pushing aside the arras, disclosed a small door. He opened it, and a second later Lady Yvette found herself in the corridor.

"Where is madame's chamber?" asked the Moor.

The corridor was dark. Lady Yvette had not the slightest idea of the locality of her chamber, whether it lay to the right or left, as they had withdrawn from the banqueting room by another door than that by which she had entered when conducted thither by Sir Hugh. Here was a fresh complication. They stood in the darkness, irresolute. The uproar

within the banqueting room was deafening. At every fresh outburst of drunken merriment Lady Yvette shivered. She was now trembling violently. The maiden knight, who had mingled in the conflict of battle without thought of fear, was now terrorized by the sight and sound of drunken revelers. As they stood there, the flickering light of a torch was seen gleaming through the darkness. The lady and the Moor drew back against the wall, seeking refuge in the friendly shadow. Nearer came the light, till they could distinguish the outlines of a woman's form. Lady Yvette held her breath, then gave a low cry of joy, for she had recognized Jeanne-Marie, her waiting-woman.

"Jeanne-Marie!" she called in a shrill whisper. "Wait! Wait!"

The girl stopped, shielded her eyes with her hand from the light of the torch, and peered into the gloom.

"Here! It is I—Lady Yvette!"

The girl gave an inarticulate cry.

"Hush-sh!" cautioned Lady Yvette.

"Go forward, madame," whispered the Moor, "and make no mention of Mahmoud the Moor to any one, I pray you."

"I am coming, Jeanne-Marie," said Lady Yvette, in low tones.

Jeanne-Marie waited till her lady approached near enough for her to see her, then put out her

hand, which Lady Yvette took and was thus led through the gloom to her chamber. Once safe in the seclusion of her own room, she threw herself down upon the bed and gave way to a paroxysm of weeping. Jeanne-Marie lighted the wick in the lamp suspended from the ceiling, then extinguished the torch, and going to her mistress, took her in her arms, and drawing the tear-stained face against her bosom, soothed her with inarticulate murmurings and caresses.

The unspoken sympathy of her dumb companion comforted Lady Yvette. Still it was long before she slept, and even then the faithful Jeanne-Marie sat by her bedside the whole night through.

Lady Yvette did not leave her chamber the next day. The following morning Sir Hugh sent to inquire why she did not appear, and bidding her presence at dinner. She returned answer that she was ill and unable to leave her bed. The messenger came a second time, saying that Sir Hugh would wait two days for her to recover her usual health; then, did she not appear at table, he would present himself in person to inquire concerning her condition.

Lady Yvette preferred to encounter Sir Hugh in company rather than alone. Alone, she was entirely in his power; below, there was at least the dwarf, who might again prove efficient aid in time of need. Why had he espoused her cause against the lord of

the castle? How did he, a stranger, know of the little door concealed behind the arras? The knowledge that she had a friend within the castle walls, other than her devoted but mute waiting-woman, even though a black man and foreigner, raised her spirits not a little. She did not feel so absolutely defenceless. Perhaps through him she might make known her state to her liege, King Charles of Navarre.

On the second day Lady Yvette attired herself as plainly as her limited wardrobe permitted, and prepared to descend to the room where the knight and his suite dined. Jeanne-Marie accompanied her to the door of the dining-room; this time Lady Yvette took note of the direction, so as to be able to find her way back to her room alone, should occasion demand it. As she entered the apartment she was surprised to see so few at table. Sir Hugh's place was vacant, as were also those usually filled by his bachelor knights and squires. The seneschal was there, as were also his lady, her maidens, the pages, and those officers of the household whose position entitled them to a seat at the lord's table. Lady Yvette took her place after saluting the company, and was waited upon with the respectful attention to which her high rank entitled her. She made no inquiries respecting the lord and his attendants, thinking they were spending the day with the hounds or with the falcons. It was a respite, at

least, for by the time the Red Knight returned he would be hungry and sleepy and would probably give no thought to her.

After dinner, Dame Radegonde, the wife of the seneschal, invited Lady Yvette to withdraw with her and her maidens to her boudoir. It was here that Dame Radegonde instructed the young women intrusted to her care in certain of the arts of housewifery, including spinning and tapestry work. Lady Yvette gladly accepted the invitation, rejoiced to be freed from the monotony of her own company and that of her dumb waiting-woman. A little later the seneschal appeared and challenged his wife's guest to a game of chess. The afternoon passed quickly, and five o'clock came, the supper hour, before Lady Yvette was prepared for it. Hastily making her excuses, she would have withdrawn, but Dame Radegonde, putting her hand upon her arm, said:

"Sweet my lady, do not deprive us of your company. We are still few, for Sir Hugh and his suite have been unexpectedly summoned abroad to engage in some enterprise, and will not return for some days."

After that she spent her afternoons with Dame Radegonde, sometimes playing at chess or backgammon, sometimes with her fingers busy over the tapestry-frame and listening to Dame Radegonde's gossip concerning the doings of the castle. It was then she learned the pitiful history of Jeanne-Marie, and

Dame Radegonde finished her recital with a sigh, saying:

"I always fear for my demoiselles when Sir Hugh is staying at St. Brice. Praise God, it is but seldom, and no harm has come to any one who has been under my care."

Lady Yvette saw nothing and heard nothing of the Moor. She did not allude to him, for she remembered his request that she should make no reference to him. She had now the freedom of the castle, for Sir Hugh had left no instructions regarding her, except that she should not be permitted to leave the castle gates. One day, as she was walking along the inner wall, she saw the dwarf in the outer court. He saluted her respectfully, but made no effort to gain speech with her, much to her disappointment, for she was anxious to learn more of him. Also she hoped to be able to send a message by him to one of her friends. But the Moor bided his time till he met Lady Yvette attended only by Jeanne-Marie; then he went up to her, and said:

"Madame, I am come from your friends to rescue you."

The young girl looked at him in amazement.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"A friend and *serviteur* of your friends," was the vague reply.

"How did you discover my whereabouts?" she asked.

"Pardon, madame, but may I speak to your woman?"

"Out of my hearing?" she asked, suspiciously.

"No, madame; it would be better that you should hear and know all."

"Speak, then."

"Jeanne-Marie," he said, "wilt thou be faithful to Lady Yvette, if when she shall escape she will promise to take thee with her?"

The girl's face brightened visibly, and she nodded her head affirmatively.

"I am Joli-cœur," he continued, "whom you have not yet recognized on account of my stained face, and also because of this gown which covers my crooked limbs."

Jeanne-Marie looked at him sharply and for long.

"Even yet thou dost not recognize me?"

She shook her head negatively.

Then he dropped his strange accent and spoke in a lower tone of voice, and pulling aside his long robe, discovered to her his poor twisted legs.

"Dost not remember these legs, and who broke them?" he asked.

A look of recognition flashed into the mute's eyes, and she nodded a decided and emphatic "Yes."

"Thou knowest I have no more reason to love Sir Hugh than thyself."

A look of malignant hate distorted the girl's features as she gave vent to an inarticulate cry of rage.

"I have met those who have succored me and who have gained my gratitude, who have not repulsed me on account of my misfortune," continued Joli-cœur. "And I found them bemoaning the abduction of Lady Yvette by Sir Hugh, and their anger and despair were great because they knew not where he had taken her; and I swore I would find her, for no one knows Sir Hugh's habits better than I; also that I would restore her to her own, alone if I could, but, if necessary, with the aid of——"

Lady Yvette interrupted him impetuously:

"Tell me—tell me all!"

Then he related all that had happened since her abduction—Raimond's return to Bocasse, his departure northward again to obtain succor for his lady; his meeting with Joli-cœur in the English freebooters' cave; their encounter with Sir Gaston, whom Raimond had believed to be dead, and how he had at once started to the rescue of Bocasse.

At this point in the narrative Lady Yvette's heart gave a leap of joy.

"Where is he now?" she asked eagerly.

"At Bocasse, madame, was where I left him."

"At Bocasse!" she repeated, as if she had not heard aright.

"Yes, madame, at Bocasse, which he will defend until your return."

"But how came he to be at Bocasse?"

Then Joli-cœur went on to tell how Bocasse had

been retaken, and that Sir Gaston, though eager to set out in quest of her, was reluctantly compelled to remain at Bocasse till, as he thought, Messire de Bonciel could be brought back by the Damoiseau Raimond, who had already departed to find him. But Joli-cœur, he said, intended that madame should be back at Bocasse as soon as her captain of the guard.

"But how didst thou gain admittance into the château?" asked the Lady Yvette.

"By disguising myself, madame, and joining a company of mummers, whom I brought to this place as the most likely one where Sir Hugh would bring you."

"But how didst thou recognize me? Thou hadst never seen me."

"Damoiseau Raimond had told me, madame, that his lady was the most beautiful lady in France; and when I saw you, madame, seated beside the Red Knight, I knew you could be no other than the one whom I was seeking."

"Ah, my good Raimond!" sighed Lady Yvette. "When shall I see thee again?"

"Soon, madame, I hope."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed the lady, with feverish haste. "Go tell them thou hast found me, and urge them to send an army to my rescue ere it be too late. Never will the Red Knight ransom me, and he may return at any day," and then she paused and shivered —"then it may be too late."

"St. Brice is well fortified and has a strong garrison, madame; much time would be consumed in reducing it. Perhaps we may find friends within who will aid us. Some of the men-at-arms have good hearts; some of them may be won over to madame's cause."

"Ah, if I were in possession of what was once my own wherewith I might reward them, they should gain largely by leaving Sir Hugh's service for mine," she said, despondently.

"Madame need not deplore the lack of gold," replied Joli-cœur, quickly. "I have more than enough to pay them according to their deserts; almost enough according to their desires. With the help of Jeanne-Marie, and with my good gold pieces to smooth the way, madame shall be free before the return of Sir Hugh."

Ere Lady Yvette could ask whence came this gold, Joli-cœur hastily saluted her and withdrew. Glancing around, the lady saw one of the pages approaching. He had come to invite her in the name of the seneschal to a game of chess. She assented, and followed the youth to the apartment of Lady Radegonde, where the seneschal awaited her. Her thoughts were little on the game, therefore was she soon beaten. Not till after supper was she free to seek the seclusion of her own room and to think over the joyful news brought her by the supposed Moor.

She was soon to be free! To be relieved from the hateful attentions of the Red Knight! Oh, how distasteful his presence was to her! Her eyes grew soft as she thought of Sir Gaston's hastening to her relief as soon as he had heard of her need. Well did he deserve Bocasse and its lady! Did he still crave them? If so, he should have both so soon as she were free!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ESCAPE.

MAHMOUD the Moor was a great favorite in the soldiers' quarters, as he was full of quips and jests, and could tell a good tale. He recounted the most wondrous adventures, for he represented that he had been in the service of a great Moorish prince in Granada, from whose service he had been obliged secretly to fly because he had been converted to Christianity. He had fled northward, been captured by the Spaniards, who had done him much honor because of his wit and learning; even the king had sent for him, and made him a present of handsome raiment as well as a purse of gold. Then he had crossed the Pyrenees, fallen in with a great lord who was on the point of departing for the Holy Land in fulfilment of a vow. On their return, after having seen the wonders of the Orient, their vessel was shipwrecked on the coast of Algeria, and while in Africa he had met with adventures that eclipsed all the travellers' tales of that credulous period.

His tales even threw Othello's experience into the shade, that heroic but unreasonable Moor who wins

the love of his lady with tales of the dangers through which he had passed, of—

"Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch heaven,
And of the cannibals who did each other eat,
The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders."

In the open space between the inner and outer walls the garrison were wont to congregate and demand a story from the much-travelled Moor, who, in truth, was a Frenchman that had never travelled farther north than Orleans, nor farther east than the River Rhone, never crossed the Pyrenees, nor sailed the Mediterranean. But Joli-cœur was always ready with some fresh invention; for he had a vivid imagination, a nimble wit, and a retentive memory, and would have made his fortune as a sensational novelist had he lived five centuries later. Moreover, as his listeners knew no more than he did, he was at no disadvantage on the score of want of local coloring and verisimilitude, so long as his colors were high and his incidents startling. Had he not something more wonderful to relate than previous travellers, his narratives would have been regarded with distrust and his veracity discredited.

One of his most interested listeners was a brigand who, by reason of his corpulency, was called Etienne le Gros. One day he and four or five others were throwing dice, when Joli-cœur took up his stand be-

side them and favored the players with his observations, that passed for the wisdom of a sage on account of his sententious manner of delivery and the triteness of their sentiment.

"To chance the fortune of a lifetime on the throw of a dice is the prudence of fools."

"Small are the fortunes of a brigand and soon spent," growled one of the men, known as Jules le Hardi, on account of his recklessness.

"There's a fortune always for him who knows how to seek it," replied Joli-cœur.

"And where may mine be?" asked a young fellow called Henri.

"Where mine is, perhaps," replied Joli-cœur. "From the Saracens I learned to cast horoscopes," he continued, "and I have cast thine, Etienne le Gros, as well as mine, and the stars say we have somewhat to do in common."

"A pest on thy horoscopes and stars!" exclaimed Etienne le Gros, throwing aside the dice. "Thy coming has sent luck from me. Come, tell us again how thou didst escape from those three-eyed men."

"Surely, 'tis an old tale well worn with the telling," said Joli-cœur, indifferently.

"But I have not heard it," cried Henri.

"Nor I," exclaimed Jules le Hardi.

"Nor I," echoed Guillaume.

"*Eh bien!* We—that is, my lord and his retinue and crew—set sail from the Holy Land with a ves-

sel well laden with treasure that we had taken from the dogs of the infidels, and at first had a good sea, fair wind, and a quick sail. But after being on the water for a week or two there arose a terrible gale that blew us out of our course till we came near a country inhabited by the strangest kind of men. They were as tall as trees, and were planted along the shore like a forest, and their mouths, which were of the bigness of buckets, were wide open, and a hissing and sucking sound issued therefrom, and the air was greatly agitated; and afterward I learned that it was their custom to assemble on the coast at certain periods of the year, and by the wind produced from their mouths caused hurricanes that sucked vessels inward to their shores that they might prey upon their cargoes. In spite of all the efforts of the sailors to keep the vessel away from the shore, we were drawn in. Presently those horrid creatures waded out into the water to the boat, and seizing it, dragged it up on the beach. Then could we see that they had three eyes; a great eye burned in the middle of their forehead above the other two that glowed like a live coal when the lid was lifted. This was generally kept closed, for did its glance fall upon aught, it shrivelled as from a flash of lightning. But as the eye did not move in the socket like ordinary eyes, if one could only keep out of its range he was safe. In fact, the three eyes were immovable; the upper one looked straight ahead, the left saw to the

right, while the right looked to the left; but they could not look downward; and I, being short, kept out of their range, while all the others were blasted and burned to a cinder as in the twinkling of an eye. I hid under a sail, and under cover of darkness managed to make my escape from the boat into the woods. Well, the next morning the monsters stripped the bodies of my dead companions of all their clothing and threw them into the sea. Then they searched the vessel. Their astonishment was so great when they discovered the treasure contained therein that they forgot to keep their upper eye closed, and there were so many of those dreadful fire-flashing eyes fixed upon the boat that suddenly everything blazed up. The fire frightened the monsters off, for they were in dire fear of their own fire-dealing power. So they fled to the woods. A heavy rain then set in and put out the fire on the boat. I crept back into the vessel, which was floated off by the heavy rain, and set off at once in the storm, master of all that treasure. I did not know how to steer a vessel, so I said a prayer to all the saints so as to be sure to reach the one that attended to such things that he might manage my boat. I think they must have all answered my prayer, or else tried it, and taken a hand in its steering, for I never knew which way I was going. Sometimes it was this way, sometimes that, and sometimes no way at all."

"No doubt the saints were trying to settle the question as to who was master," remarked Etienne le Gros, gravely.

"So backward and forward, to one side and the other, I sailed," continued Joli-cœur, without noticing the interruption; "and, at length, the saints settled the matter by sending my boat high up on a beach on the shores of France, so battered and leaking that I could not have remained another night aboard. But what was I going to do with all that treasure of gold and silver and precious stones?"

"What indeed!" exclaimed Jules le Hardi. "I wish I'd been there to have shown thee!"

Joli-cœur looked at him an instant without answering, and then said slowly, as if he had just thought of it and was not quite sure of his wisdom in giving expression to his thought:

"Perhaps thou mightst even now be able to help me."

"How?" eagerly asked Jules le Hardi, while the others cried:

"And why not I?"

"And me?"

"And me?"

Joli-cœur looked gravely at each in turn, and then answered with deliberation:

"Yes, and you others, also."

"What can we do?" And they all crowded about

the dwarf in their eagerness. But he was not to be hurried.

"It still remains to be taken away."

"Where is it?" was the cry, the men half turning as if they were ready to go for it on receipt of his answer.

"In the sands on the shores of the Mediterranean not far from Montpellier," was the reply.

"'Tis in the enemy's country," said Guillaume, who was more prudent than his fellows.

"A man's worst enemy is lack of gold," said Joli-cœur.

"With gold in our pouches, we'd have need to fear neither the English nor the French, nor yet neither Navarrese nor Spaniards," said Jules le Hardi.

"But the Navarrese are no longer allies of the English, and should we be taken——"

"Why should we be taken?" asked Jules. "Could we not serve the King of Navarre as well as the Red Knight?"

"But how do we know the treasure is there?" interposed Guillaume. "We have no proof of what this Moor has told us. Besides it may all be the devil's work."

For answer Joli-cœur opened the pouch that hung from his belt and drew therefrom some gold pieces and a few gems. The men's eyes lighted up quickly. It was worth risking the chance of the Evil One's being concerned in the transaction. Indeed, if there

had not been so many of them, one to bear witness against the other, or at least to dispute the possession, Joli-cœur and his gold would have soon parted company. But each was constrained by the presence of the others. The dwarf, perceiving that he had made an impression, said slowly:

"This is but a sample of what lies covered up by the sands of the Mediterranean. He who will go with me to help me bear it away shall have half as much as he can carry."

"Share the contents of thy pouch with us and we will go," suggested Henri.

"No," replied Joli-cœur. "I must keep this to pay the expenses of the journey. However, if you will swear by the crucifix to aid me, each of you shall have two pieces of gold."

"I swear!" said all of the men, almost in unison.

"How shall we arrange to leave the castle?" asked Guillaume, who was always looking out for consequences. "Sir Hugh would soon hear of it and pursue us; then would our heads and gold be missing."

"Faith, he must catch us first!" said Jules le Hardi.

"*Parbleu!* That's a fact!" said Etienne le Gros.

"There are other lords to serve," remarked Guillaume.

"He that has gold need serve no master," answered Etienne. "I am growing too stiff and fat to fight much longer."

"You are all brave fellows," said Joli-cœur; "too good to go hither and thither at a word from a lord who gains all the glory and profit, for what would a seigneur be if it were not for his followers?" Which all goes to prove that labor agitators are not entirely the product of a later civilization.

"What shall we do?" asked the practical and prudent Guillaume.

"Have you the privilege to leave the castle at will?" asked Joli-cœur, overjoyed at the quickness of the brigands to swallow his bait.

"We may get permission," replied Jules le Hardi.

"On horse?"

"Nay, we are but foot soldiers."

"Do you never ride?"

"Only when we exercise the horses left in the stables."

"And when may that be?"

"Almost every fine morning."

"Keep yourselves in readiness, then. You will hear from me within three days," said the dwarf.

The next thing for Joli-cœur to do was to provide himself with three extra horses, one for himself—that were easy to do, for his good humor and merry wit made all willing to oblige him—and one each for Lady Yvette and Jeanne-Marie; next to devise some pretext for them to join the riding party; and, last, to communicate with the Lady of Bocasse.

His plan was that Lady Yvette and her waiting-

woman should assume the costume of *damoiseaux*, of which there were several in the château. He must first procure the suits. He visited the tailoring offices, and while entertaining the cutters and sewers with his drolleries, kept a sharp lookout. He saw two suits laid aside, just completed. The thing was to get possession of them, so he stayed on and on until the dusk came, when he managed to slip them under his robe, unobserved, though his was then a funny fat figure. Then he scraped up an acquaintance with two of the pages who were receiving their *nourriture* at St. Brice, and upon promising to bestow upon each a magic talisman that would strengthen the arm that wields the sword and throws the lance, making them always invincible when they should become knights, he was invited into their sleeping-closet, where he succeeded in purloining all that was lacking in his two outfits. He proposed they should accompany the exercising party the next day, so that he might show them the hut of an old witch whose aid they might one day find useful, and who would dispose of her charms but to a few favored ones who were recommended to her by some one she knew. The ring he would give to them would insure her most powerful charms just by the showing of it to her.

To see Lady Yvette was more difficult, so to one of his friends, a *serviteur* of the inner court, he pretended a violent passion for Jeanne-Marie, and

begged his help to get speech with her. He was chaffed on his choice of a mute for a sweetheart, but he replied that was the attraction which commended itself most powerfully to him, for it was the sourness of a woman's tongue that often spoiled the sweetness of her lips. So the domestic *serviteur*, made complaisant by a piece of gold, undertook to procure for Joli-cœur a private interview with pretty Jeanne-Marie. Willing enough was the girl to keep the appointment when she learned that it was to be with the Moor, for she alone, save her mistress, knew of his identity, though he had previously lived in the château and among its people for over a year.

To Jeanne-Marie, Joli-cœur confided his plans of action, and to her he delivered the pages' costumes that he had secured by cunning. Lady Yvette's movements were not restricted, save that she was not to be permitted to leave the castle walls; consequently it would be comparatively easy for her to escape in the guise of a page, for only the house *serviteurs* were familiar with her form and features. The pages were also free to come and go within the walls at will, and also without the walls under proper protection. The difficulty would be to substitute Lady Yvette and Jeanne-Marie for the *damoiseaux*, Geng and Jourdain. That problem was more puzzling to Joli-cœur than any other. At length he had solved it. He would get Jeanne-Marie to drop into their wine the evening previous to the morning

of their escape some of the powder he had formerly used to produce sleep, which he had procured from an Eastern merchant, and which had made his life in the freebooters' cave endurable.

He gave Jeanne-Marie full and careful directions; by her expressive countenance and the quick movements of her head and hands she made him understand that she comprehended everything he had told her and would do it. Unable to speak, yet must Jeanne-Marie induce Lady Yvette to dress herself in the page's suit and to follow her to the stables directly after the morning meal. However, the Maid of Bocasse was quick of comprehension, and understood at once that flight was to be attempted, and questioned her mute waiting-woman so closely that she was enabled to obtain a tolerable idea of Joli-cœur's plans in regard to the escape by the nods and shakes of her head.

As Joli-cœur had foreseen, Jourdain and Geng did not make their appearance the morning of the intended evasion, and the stablemen and boys, as well as the brigands, took no heed of the two youths who presented themselves in their places, taking it for granted that they were of their lord's household, *damoiseaux* who were training for knighthood under his patronage. Once in the open, Joli-cœur, also on horseback, rode up to Lady Yvette and led her and Jeanne-Marie in another direction than that taken by the rest of the party, except by the six brigands

who were to escort Lady Yvette to Bocasse, never suspecting the true object of their journey. Their escape was not noticed till the party returned to the castle, and then it was supposed that they had missed their way and would shortly return.

The six brigands were considerably surprised and not at all pleased at the addition of the two supposed pages to their party, and Joli-cœur had some difficulty in satisfying them. He did not dare disclose the fact of their being women, especially that one of them was their lord's late prisoner from Bocasse, fearing they would insist upon returning to St. Brice with Lady Yvette; for to assist in the escape of a captive was a grave offence, a breach of loyalty to their lord; not that their sense of honor was so great, but their faith in his promises would be broken, as they would no longer believe the tale of the buried treasure, and would suspect him of further deception, even did he promise to save them from Sir Hugh's vengeance and to reward them largely for their help in aiding the escape of the Lady of Bocasse. Therefore, while answering their inquiries with apparent frankness, he let fall no hint of the truth, but said that the noble youths were dissatisfied with the conduct of Sir Hugh toward them in not making them squires, and were returning home to their fathers' castles. He furthermore silenced their grumbling by reminding them of the terms of their agreement, to-wit: "Every man was

to have as his portion half as much as he could carry"; no more, no less; consequently the number sharing the treasure was not their concern. There was more than enough for all, these young gentlemen included; but, as they could themselves see, the *damoiseaux* were not so strong as they, and their share would not be so large.

It was the night of the second day since they had left St. Brice, and they had stopped for food and rest at an inn in one of the large towns through which they passed. Lady Yvette and Jeanne-Marie, having finished supper, had just withdrawn to the upper chamber where they were to sleep. Another night they would sleep at Bocasse. Lady Yvette was standing by the gabled window and looking down into the street. A faint smile parted her lips at the thought of being so near home. She thought also of the handsome gallant knight whose love she had doubted, and whom now she believed to have loved her for her sake alone and not on account of her broad domains.

There was a clatter of hoofs and a jingling of spurs. A small body of horse rode up before the inn. Lady Yvette had scarcely glanced at them ere she recognized their leader. Rushing to the head of the stairs, she cried to Joli-cœur, who was still sitting at the table below with the six brigands:

"Quick! Ascend! Sir Hugh has come! Oh, Joli-cœur!" This last was almost a wail.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PURSUIT.

As Joli-cœur caught the meaning of Lady Yvette's cry he jumped to his feet. For an instant his heart failed him, and his legs refused to support him. Leaning against the table so as not to fall, he said hoarsely:

"We are undone!"

By this time there was a great commotion outside. Horses were stamping, armor was clattering, men were shouting; while the innkeeper rushed to the door to welcome the newcomers.

"Quick!" cried Joli-cœur in a low voice. "We must get out of this!"

"What is it? Who has come?" asked two or three together.

"Sir Hugh," replied the dwarf briefly.

The six brigands jumped to their feet simultaneously, and looked about for means of escape. The innkeeper was conducting his guests in by one door, the servants were bringing in food by the other. There was no other way for them than to ascend the stairs to the chamber where Lady Yvette was awaiting Joli-cœur, her face blanched with terror.

Hardly had the last brigand set foot on the lowest step when the great gruff voice of the Red Knight was heard demanding supper.

"We are lost!" cried Lady Yvette, wringing her hands.

Joli-cœur did not reply immediately. He was thinking. After a moment he said:

"Our position is very difficult. Should the landlord speak of me, we are indeed lost."

"Can we not flee?" asked Lady Yvette. "See, there is yet the window."

"And the street full of passers-by."

"Darkness will soon come," suggested Etienne le Gros.

"There is no other way," replied Joli-cœur. "We must leave to-night as soon as all are abed. The innkeeper will be sure to mention us. My unusual appearance causes remark. A word in regard to me will excite Sir Hugh's suspicions if he finds I am in company with brigands instead of mummers, as I appeared with the latter at Saint Brice."

"Should he see us," said Guillaume, grimly, "then would he hang us for deserting his service."

"Thou dost not even yet know the Red Knight if thou think that is the worst fate to befall us," replied Etienne le Gros.

"He hath the malignant wit of the Evil One when it comes to devising means of punishment," said Joli-cœur, for the moment forgetting himself.

"How shouldst thou know?" asked Jules le Hardi, quickly.

"Because it is not the first visit I have paid to Château Saint Brice," he answered briefly.

Lady Yvette walked the floor of the chamber. To be taken now would be too horrible. While they were still talking, footsteps sounded on the stairs. They listened with bated breath. In a moment the innkeeper appeared. Very consequential was his manner. It was not to every innkeeper that came the honor of entertaining such distinguished guests as those who had last sought his hospitality. So taken up was he with the sense of his importance that he did not observe the evident signs of consternation among his other guests.

"A grand *seigneur* has arrived," he announced pompously, "with a large company of men-at-arms, and they require all the resources of the inn for their entertainment; therefore must I ask you and your companions to go elsewhere for your lodgings."

"But, innkeeper, are we to be turned away so late at night, and no other inn within a league or more?" asked Lady Yvette, for the sake of getting more time.

"There are other inns for such as you," replied the innkeeper, rudely. "As for me, it must be as the grand *seigneur* wills."

"We would have paid for our lodgment and entertainment with as good gold and with as much as my lord, this great baron, whoever he may be.

Here, take this for the food we have already eaten." Opening his pouch, Joli-cœur drew from it two gold pieces. One he handed to the innkeeper, the other he retained between his fingers. "We will seek lodgings elsewhere."

Though he spoke confidently, the heart of Joli-cœur was heavy, for the only way of leaving the inn was through the room in which Sir Hugh and his company were supping.

The sight of the gold changed the humor of the innkeeper. 'Twere a pity that it should go into a rival's chest. Perhaps, after all, he might accommodate all his guests.

"If this chamber will serve you all to sleep in," he said, slowly, "I might be able to explain to my lord, so that he would consent to some of his men sleeping below. But I cannot give you, as I agreed, two rooms—one for these two young gentlemen and another for thee and thy men."

"We will manage with one room for the once," replied Joli-cœur. His quiet tone did not reveal the relief the landlord's decision had given him. Now would they have time to devise some means of escape from the inn without encountering the Red Knight.

"Take this, then," he said, holding the other piece of gold out to the landlord. "We may leave early, perhaps before you are stirring, as we have a long day's journey before us."

The innkeeper took the gold and went downstairs. Hardly had the men commenced to plan their escape when the sound of steps was once more heard. The innkeeper was coming up again. Were they to be turned out after all?

"I have spoken with my lord. He will permit you to stay, but bids you wait upon him in the morning. He says if you are masterless men you may enter his service, as he has need of more brigands and pays well."

"Say to my lord that after we have escorted these young gentlemen to their destination we shall be free to seek a new lord," replied Joli-cœur.

"But my lord said naught about thee," returned the innkeeper, a little contemptuously. "Thou couldst do little service for any lord."

"I but spoke for my comrades," replied the dwarf, mildly, but with relief that he should not have been mentioned.

As soon as silence had settled upon the inn and darkness upon the town, Joli-cœur proposed his plan for escape. Their apartment had a projecting window that overhung the street, which was not fifteen feet below. It would not be difficult to let themselves down from the window-ledge. Jules le Hardi, an athletic young fellow, proposed to go first. Etienne le Gros and Hervis were well advanced in years and were stout and stiff; so Joli-cœur directed Guillaume, Henri, and Jean to remain above and

lower the rest of the company to the ground by means of a rope made of the bedclothes. A loop was knotted in one end that served as a sort of a seat, and thus the Lady Yvette, Jeanne-Marie, Joli-cœur, Hervis, and Etienne were let down in turn, though the weight of the two last-named came near breaking their improvised rope. The three remaining brigands easily swung themselves out of the window into the street.

"How shall we get our horses?" whispered Etienne, who loved not to walk.

"We must leave them behind," answered Joli-cœur.

Etienne le Gros groaned.

"Already are my legs stiff with much riding, and now to walk——" He broke off; words failed him in his extremity.

"Thy legs may be minus a head if they refuse to serve thee," replied Jules le Hardi.

"We cannot get our horses without arousing the people of the inn," said Joli-cœur. "We are wasting time that ought to widen the distance between us and Sir Hugh. It is but little past midnight. There is a fair not many miles off; we should reach it by daybreak. There we may buy horses, and yet be able to arrive at Bocasse before the sun sets on another day."

This information seemed to put new heart into them all. They started out briskly in the still night

air. The town had not been left far behind when Jeanne-Marie gave a little cry.

"They are wolves," said Lady Yvette.

But the howls were going from them instead of toward the travellers. This part of their journey had been accomplished in safety despite several other alarms, and dawn found them at the fair grounds. Though it was yet so early in the day, they had no difficulty in procuring refreshment from the enterprising proprietor of a booth that provided food for man and beast. They also bought permission to rest on the benches and heaps of straw intended for the accommodation of patrons who had come from a distance and travelled with slender purses.

"Is it prudent to remain here?" asked Lady Yvette. "What if Sir Hugh should suspect and pursue us?"

"We cannot procure horses until the traders are awake," replied Joli-cœur. "To rest now is to lose no time, rather to gain it, for we will travel better if fresh."

Lady Yvette made no further objection. The long night walk had indeed wearied her, and she was glad to rest even on the rude bench designated to her by the booth owner.

They slept till the sun was quite high; then Joli-cœur and Etienne le Gros went about in quest of steeds to carry them to their destination. The dwarf was no judge of horse-flesh, and left the matter of

selection and price to Etienne le Gros, who bought the best horses he could find. Joli-cœur did not know that the six brigands appropriated the strongest and fleetest animals, leaving the inferior ones to himself and the two pages. The practised eye of Lady Yvette told her of the fact, but she made no comment lest it lead to too much talk. Nothing must be done to arouse any suspicion in the minds of the brigands that the two pages were not what they seemed.

By this time Lady Yvette could no longer restrain her impatience. Already it was almost noon. Calling to Joli-cœur, she implored him to give the order to start immediately.

"Have no fear, madame," he said, reassuringly; "the horses are perfectly fresh, and we shall arrive at Bocasse before dark."

"If we arrive at all, Joli-cœur," answered Lady Yvette. "I fear the pursuit of Sir Hugh, and will continue to fear it until the walls of Bocasse safely shelter us."

In less than five minutes they were mounted and speeding on their way southward. The first part of their journey lay through a wooded country, and Lady Yvette soon forgot her forebodings and fears in the swift exhilarating canter in the fresh crisp air. Later they left the shade of the trees and came upon a great sandy plain, where there was absolutely no protection from the glare of the sun. Here they

were obliged to proceed more slowly, for the air was warmer and less invigorating, and their horses began to show the effects of their long gallop. Lady Yvette's horse particularly showed signs of fatigue, lagging behind the others. Joli-cœur kept close to her side, as did also Jeanne-Marie. The six brigands were in advance, though the dwarf had tried to keep three in front of Lady Yvette and three in the rear for her better protection.

"Look," said Lady Yvette; "they see something."

The six brigands had drawn rein, and stood waiting for the rest of the party to reach them.

"There is a party of horsemen approaching us," said Jules le Hardi. "Shall we meet them?"

"I can see naught but a cloud of dust," said Joli-cœur, whose sight was somewhat dimmed with age. "If it be raised by men, perchance they are on their way to the fair."

Lady Yvette did not agree with him.

"We are too far from the fair, I think," she said. "Still, we are now in Navarre, and no doubt they are friends. Perhaps they may come from Bocasse."

"We will wait a little, till we may see more distinctly."

They waited there in the middle of the road, their eyes strained toward the point whence the cloud of dust appeared.

"If there were any shelter around whereby we

might conceal ourselves till we are sure!" murmured Lady Yvette.

Suddenly Jules le Hardi, whose eyes were the sharpest, leaned forward in his saddle, then exclaimed hoarsely:

"*Nom du diable!* 'Tis the Red Knight himself!"

Scarcely had the words left his lips ere he dug his spurs into the flanks of his horse, which plunged wildly across the plain, Guillaume following at his heels. The four remaining brigands dashed to the left, scattering in different directions as they also rode swiftly away. Lady Yvette, Jeanne-Marie, and Joli-cœur kept close together; one would not desert another, thus making their capture easier. The brigands were soon out of sight; the other three runaways turned their horses' heads and fled to where two roads intersected, hoping, by taking the road westward that led nowhere in particular, to escape pursuit in case they had not been seen. But they soon heard the cry of pursuit. Sir Hugh and his men-at-arms had discovered them at the same time they themselves had been seen.

"We must separate," cried Lady Yvette; and she urged her horse toward the west, while Joli-cœur and Jeanne-Marie sped eastward. But Lady Yvette's horse had gone as far as he could. He tried to do now what was expected of him, and stumbled forward, went a few steps farther, and fell, never to rise again. Springing from the saddle, the young

girl looked about her. Not a friendly tree or rock was in sight. A dead level stretched away on all sides. She had given herself up for lost, when she spied a ditch that was nearly dry. Running toward it, she found she could lie at its bottom out of sight of any one passing along either of the roads. Presently she heard the beat of hoofs, and a number of horsemen clattered by. Would they take the road to the west or the east? Her horse lay in full sight should they ride westward. She listened. Her heart beat so fiercely and so loudly that she could scarcely hear anything else. She felt the throb of the earth respond to the beats of hoofs. They had not stopped! She lay there, scarce daring to breathe, till she could hear no sound save the thumping of her own heart and the buzzing of insects in the coarse grass above her. Cautiously she raised her head and peered out. Just then she heard the stamp in the road as if a horse were seeking to dislodge a fly. She drew back quickly, but not before she met the eyes of the Red Knight, that, gleaming with malignant triumph, were looking down into hers!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RED KNIGHT'S VENGEANCE.

SIR HUGH had no suspicion that the guests at the inn who had engaged the rooms he wanted for his suite were any acquaintances of his. When he learned that six of them were stalwart men accustomed to arms, he considered it not unlikely but that he might be able to add them to his company, as he was always on the lookout for recruits. When morning came, and he was told that the party had fled during the night, leaving their horses behind, he questioned the innkeeper closely regarding them, his suspicions being aroused by their flight. As soon as he heard that there were a dwarf and two *damoiseaux* of the party, he knew something was wrong, for he recognized the description of the dwarf as being that of the Moor, whom he had not yet discovered to be his one-time jester, Joli-cœur. He suspected that the dwarf had come from Château St. Brice. Had he been in company with the mummers, the knight would not have given him a second thought, but the six brigands and the two *damoiseaux* puzzled him. He ordered his horses saddled imme-

diately after breakfast, and started with his men in pursuit of the fugitives, whom the innkeeper reported as having said that they were travelling southward. Sir Hugh and his attendants passed them while they were seeking refreshment and rest at the fair. He had travelled fast and far, expecting to overtake them at any moment; but as miles were traversed and houses passed without signs or tidings of the fugitives, he concluded they must have taken another road. Perchance the innkeeper was in league with them and had purposely misled him, for they might possibly be merchants with valuable merchandise. In that case, he would have the merchandise and punish the innkeeper, who should learn to his sorrow the penalty of deceiving the Red Knight.

Sir Hugh had discovered the fugitives as soon as they had discovered him. When they had turned and scattered, he had ordered his men-at-arms to recapture them. He and several others pursued Jolicœur and the two pages. On reaching the fallen horse of Lady Yvette, he had dismounted, ordering his companions to proceed, as he was quite sure one of the fugitives was not far off. From him he might learn something of the rest. He had spied the footsteps of Lady Yvette in the dusty road, and a moment later saw some one run across the meadowland. Following quickly, he saw the figure suddenly disappear. His footsteps made no sound on the grass, and he reached the ditch without being heard

by Lady Yvette. Catching a glimpse of the face of the supposed page, he at once recognized his former prisoner. It had suited his humor to stand motionless near the ditch until the lady should believe herself safe from pursuit.

A burning desire to revenge himself upon her for her indifference and the desire to win her favor struggled for supremacy in the heart of the Red Knight. He would subdue her—possess her; and then, should she continue to spurn him, he would humiliate her; and after, he would satisfy his vengeance with her life.

"Get up," he said, roughly, when he saw that she had recognized him.

Lady Yvette sprang to her feet and stood regarding him defiantly.

"There is nothing to prevent me from smiting thee where thou standst," he said, with his hand on his swordhilt.

"Nothing, my lord; not even thy sense of the courtesy due a lady," she answered, meeting his wrathful gaze unflinchingly.

"Didst thou expect to escape me?" he asked, passing over the latter part of her reply.

"If not, surely I were a fool to try," she responded, coolly.

When brought under the spell of those calm eyes, there came a wavering in Sir Hugh's purpose, but he struggled against the yielding.

"Come," he said, "thou shalt ride back on my horse." He put out his hand to take her by the arm.

"I will follow," she replied, shrinking from his touch.

"Dost think I trust thee?" he asked, seizing her by the shoulder.

"No, my lord; but there is no chance to escape—at present."

"Nor later," he answered, with cruel meaning.

By this time some of the Red Knight's attendants were seen advancing toward them, bringing with them Joli-cœur and Jeanne-Marie. The appearance of the dwarf was strangely altered. No longer was he dark of face; for his countenance presented a queer streaked appearance. He had perspired freely in his effort to outride his pursuers, and much of the brown dye had washed off. Sir Hugh gave him a searching glance; then, drawing his sword, sprang toward the dwarf with extended arm, as if he would cut off his head at one stroke. He seemed suddenly to change his mind, however, and, sheathing his sword, said:

"Secure the prisoners; and death to all of you by my hand if any escape."

Two days later they reached St. Brice. Sir Hugh had also recognized Jeanne-Marie, and had ordered that the three prisoners be separately lodged. Lady Yvette was conducted to her former apartment; the

two others were thrown into the dungeons of the keep.

Day after day passed with Lady Yvette in utter isolation. Her food and drink were thrust through the half-opened door, but by whom she could not discover, try as she would. It seemed the refinement of cruelty to leave her in absolute ignorance of her fate. Gladly would she have received the announcement of her condemnation to death. Anything would be preferable to this torturing suspense.

One morning on awakening she found on the pillow beside her head a dagger and a coronet. She had no difficulty in interpreting the signs. Marriage with the Red Knight or death. She took the dagger with a sense of protection, wearing it in her belt by day and holding it in her hand at night. She feared to sleep, for the presence of those two objects showed that there were means of access to her room of which she was ignorant. She did not believe her midnight visitor had entered through the door, for the creaking of the hinges she knew would have awakened her. However, she piled everything movable against the door at night; still she dared not sleep—secret doors were too common in castles.

Patiently she examined every part of the walls of her room. At the head of the bed she found one of the panels did not fit as closely as the rest. If it were a sliding-panel, the mystery of the presence of the dagger and coronet could be easily explained.

By pushing the panel aside, an arm could be thrust through, and the objects be deposited upon the pillow without awakening the sleeper.

She did not dare lie upon the bed so close to the panel, and determined to watch all night. How the hours dragged! A moment seemed an hour; an hour, an eternity. Daylight came without any one attempting to enter the room. And so the days and nights wore on. She could neither sleep nor eat, though her eyes were heavy with weariness and her body faint from lack of nourishment. She passed the nights in pacing the floor in order not to succumb to that overpowering sense of drowsiness, taking what rest she dared snatch by day.

One afternoon she sat in her chair half asleep, when a noise suddenly aroused her. Starting to her feet, she looked about the room, but could see nothing to cause any noise. Again came the slight sound. Then she recognized it. Some one was coming. It was too late to bring her food. Who could it be? She had not long to wait. The door opened, and Sir Hugh entered.

Lady Yvette stood leaning upon the back of her chair, for fasting and watching had so weakened her that she was scarcely able to stand.

The Red Knight came toward her, and would have taken her hand to raise to his lips had she not shrunk back.

"Ha!" he exclaimed. "Not yet wearied of thine

own company? I thought solitude would have cured thy unfriendly disposition."

"One may weary of solitude, my lord, yet not welcome intruders," replied the Lady Yvette, coldly.

"Does a lord intrude in his own castle, madame?"

"Even so, my lord, in the apartment of a lady to whom his presence is unwelcome."

"Still untamed?"

He had come with pacific intentions. Accustomed to carry all things before him, Lady Yvette's coldness fanned the flame of his passion. He would still try to win her, so he said gently, for him:

"Thou art in my power, little one. It depends entirely upon thyself how thou farest at my hands. The time has come for an understanding."

"Then have I been unfortunate if I have failed to make my lord understand," said Lady Yvette.

"I know not why I have humored thee so long." Sir Hugh was losing his temper. "Thou canst not resist me."

She made no answer. Her large eyes were fastened upon his face as if seeking to penetrate his being, to find if therein was the soul of man. He could not meet the calm steadfastness of those pure eyes, but shifted his gaze.

"Which shall it be, love and happiness, or——" He paused.

"Or what, my lord?"

"Rather would I not say. Thou hast pleased me

as hath no other woman. I am a rough wooer, perhaps, but will make a loving lord."

Lady Yvette shivered. Sir Hugh read the aversion in every line of her attitude. His softness hardened into anger.

"Speak," he said, imperatively.

"There is nothing to say, my lord, that has not already been said."

"Then dost thou force me to say it! Either thou art my bride by to-morrow's noon or thou shalt die before its close." He advanced a step. "Which shall it be?"

"Death, my lord."

The calm defiance maddened him. He had expected to find her proud spirit broken.

"Dost thou know what will precede death?" he hissed. "To die is man's destiny. Sooner or later, it matters not, so long as the life that goes before be filled with glory and satisfaction. But death after disgrace, dishonor, suffering, that is what thou must face. Wouldst thou have that soft white flesh seared under the burning irons? Would not those dainty limbs writhe upon the rack? Thy spirit is strong, but is thy flesh as strong? Many more dauntless even than thou have weakened in the torture-chamber. Would it be less galling to thy pride to yield before thy spirit succumbs to the pains of the flesh?"

"The pains of the flesh are soon ended," answered Lady Yvette, steadily, concealing the horror his

words caused her. "'Tis better to suffer and die than to suffer and live to feel it always."

"Thou hast faithful *serviteurs* who have risked all to save thee. Hast thou no thought for them? Thou shalt suffer; but for every pang thou endurest, they shall suffer a hundred. They are strong and can endure much. Death will be slow in coming to relieve them."

"Oh, thou monster in human form! Thou art born of the devil; thy thoughts are his thoughts, and thy deeds his also! What have I done to thee that thou shouldst seek to torment me so fiendishly?" cried Lady Yvette, desperately.

"I do not seek to torment thee; I seek thy love."

"Dost thou know love?" she asked, contemptuously.

"I know it and feel it."

He sprang toward her as if to seize her in his arms. She cowered against the wall, with the high-backed chair before her as a bulwark. Before he had time to drag the chair from her she had drawn the dagger from her belt, and, pointing it to her throat, cried:

"One step nearer, and I plunge this dagger into my throat!"

"Listen," he said, hoarsely. "Unless thou promise to be mine, for the Red Knight WILL NOT BE DENIED THAT WHICH HE SEEKS"—the last words were fairly shrieked—"thou and that wretched woman,

Jeanne-Marie, shall be taken into the outer court and flogged, then be delivered over to the soldiery to work their will upon you both. As to Jolicœur, he shall suffer as none has ever suffered before. All shall learn that the Red Knight will not be defied."

Overcome with horror, Lady Yvette could not speak.

"Which shall it be? Once more I ask, and, by all that is evil, it is for the last time!"

But Lady Yvette was past answering. What might have happened no one knows had not at that instant the apartment been filled with a blinding light, accompanied by a crash of thunder that shook the castle to its foundations.

A violent thunderstorm had come up unperceived by either Sir Hugh or his victim; both had been too much engrossed to notice the preliminary mutterings and rumblings. Crash after crash succeeded one another in rapid succession. Like most of his fellows at that time, Sir Hugh was exceedingly superstitious. He drew back, and as each succeeding flash illuminated the room he covered his eyes with his hands. Presently he hurried from the chamber, intent upon seeking some place where the lightning could not penetrate, forgetting, in his selfish fears, his prisoner, forgetting also to seize the dagger that could yet defeat his cruel purpose.

Overcome by the horrible alternative, Lady Yvette

had fainted. The storm passed, night came on, the dawn appeared, and Lady Yvette lay upon the floor unconscious of the fleeting hours. The stir in the courtyard below announced the awakening of the household; still was the young girl oblivious of her closely impending fate.

Within the gloomy dungeons of the keep were confined Jeanne-Marie and Joli-cœur. There, in its rat-haunted, damp stone chambers with earth floors, they also awaited their final doom.

Jeanne-Marie was no longer the comely young woman of a few weeks before. Not once, nor twice, nor thrice had she been conducted to the torture-chamber to suffer for the sake of her whom she had sought to serve. The malignity of the Red Knight toward the two women whom he had professed to love was more human than brutish; it is only the defeated passion of mankind wherein lurks the desire for revenge. With Jeanne-Marie his vengeance was corporeal in its nature; with the lady, it was directed toward the humiliation of that proud spirit that would not yield to his will. Such inconceivable sufferings had Jeanne-Marie endured that in her prayers she begged for the mercy of death.

Joli-cœur's poor misshapen limbs had been disjointed and broken, yet was his spirit undaunted. He had suffered so keenly that henceforth pain was as nothing; his sensibilities were either blunted or paralyzed.

In the green woods, outside the castle walls, the birds chirped and called and sang; in the verdant fields, the insects buzzed and hummed and flitted; overhead the sun shone; all nature was glad and joyous. When Lady Yvette regained consciousness, the sun was streaming through the windows that opened on the central court. She gazed about her in surprise at finding herself on the floor. At first she remembered nothing of the dreadful interview of the afternoon before. By degrees memory returned.

She arose with difficulty. The first thing her glance fell on was the poniard lying at her feet. She stooped and picked it up, almost falling in the effort, for her head was light and dizzy. She clutched the weapon tightly in her hand; it would save her from degradation, at least. But the doom of the self-destroyer was an appalling one—shut out from the joys of heaven. Which were better? To suffer briefly in this world, or everlastingly in the next? To flee from certain pain and humiliation to a future punishment, the horror of which is past knowing to finite man? No, no! The good God, the Holy Mother, the Blessed Son, would be merciful! Perhaps Sir Hugh had threatened that which he had no intention of doing. He could not be so utterly devoid of humanity. Did he love her, he would desist before dooming her to that which would be worse than any physical torture and death. But

in ignoble natures love and hate have a slender dividing line. Love is but desire; thwarted desire inspires hatred, and hatred demands vengeance.

Despite her weakened condition, Lady Yvette paced the limits of her chamber. Her limbs trembled with weakness, but she did not know it. She was conscious only of that sinking at the heart, that quivering, palpitating fear, that increased with every sound in the courtyard. There seemed to be an unusual stir below. It must be the bustle of preparation. She heard strange sounds in the inner court of men shouting. Could it be in derision or applause? Were Jeanne-Marie and Joli-cœur undergoing their final doom? Her fingers clutched tighter the poniard.

Oh, those horrid shouts that came to her through the narrow opening of her chamber on the outer court! Oh, the brutality of men! Excite them, and they become as ravening brutes!

The minutes passed into quarters; the quarters into halves, and the halves into hours; still was she unbidden to go below. No food was brought her. It was as if she were forgotten. No, that would be too good; they would soon come to drag her forth. She would leave that room a dead thing. The good God is merciful; He would listen to the intercessions of the faithful. There would be loyal followers of her father's house who would pray for her and pay for masses to release her soul from pur-

gatory. But suppose her fate should not be made known to them?

The din in the courtyard grew greater, the disturbance became more violent. It must be near noon—the time for the execution of her sentence. Still she waited and listened. Then came comparative quiet. It seemed as if she concentrated her whole consciousness in her ears. At length she heard footsteps. They were coming for her.

"Oh, *Seigneur mon Dieu, ayez pitié de moi?* Oh, Holy Mother, intercede for me!"

She raised the dagger to her throat, but ere she had time to use it the hand that held it dropped nerveless, and she sank swooning to the floor.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON TO SAINT BRICE.

HENRI and Guillaume had escaped pursuit, as had probably the other four brigands, for nothing more is known about them. The two first-mentioned not being acquainted with that part of the country, neither knowing the exact location of Joli-cœur's supposititious treasure, made their way in a southwesterly course. It was at the same time that Sir Gaston was returning to Bocasse from the freebooters' cave, laden with the wealth that the Gascon knight had decided to deposit in the keep of Bocasse for safety. It was not surprising, therefore, that the two fleeing brigands should find themselves confronted by a large company of mounted armed men. As they had done nothing to make them fear any man save their late lord, the Red Knight, they made no effort to evade Sir Gaston; instead, offered to hire themselves to him, as being masterless men.

Sir Gaston put a few inquiries, but references for good character were not essential in those days, and Henri and Guillaume easily satisfied Sir Gaston without revealing their former connection with Sir Hugh de Beverly or their flight from St. Brice.

Sir Gaston made a brief stay at Bocasse; he was eager to be on the road again, hoping to gain news concerning the whereabouts of the Red Knight which would lead to the rescue or ransom of Lady Yvette. The information he would have given so much to gain was at his hand, if he had but known it; neither did the two fugitives, who felt themselves ill-used by fate to be thus balked of a fortune, know that it would still be theirs would they but open their mouths and tell of their flight from Sir Hugh's castle in company with a dwarf and two pages. Thus two roads run parallel the one with the other, two travellers, hoping to meet, journey side by side unconscious each of the other's presence, because there is no friendly break in the hedge that shuts out each from the other's view.

So Sir Gaston, accompanied by Raimond as usual, began his journey northward, intending, should he hear nothing of the Red Knight on the way, to rejoin Sir Bertrand, believing that sooner or later he must get news of the abductor and would-be despoiler of the Lady of Bocasse. As they could travel only as fast as their slowest horses, their progress was not very rapid.

Raimond, boy-like, made friends with high and low, provided he was attracted by them, and was wont to visit the soldiers' quarters, for he delighted to listen to the account of their adventures. Henri and Guillaume were vainglorious like their fellows,

and indulged in great bragging and loud boasting. Being exceedingly loquacious, their garrulity surpassed their prudence, and one day Henri gave utterance to a remark in Raimond's hearing that revealed the fact that he and Guillaume had been in the service of the Red Knight.

"When did you men serve under the banner of the Red Knight?" asked Raimond, quickly.

But Henri and Guillaume at once scented danger, and answered warily, as if by the same voice, for each was trying to head off any damaging admissions by the other:

"Some time since."

"Did either of you ever hear of Joli-cœur?" still questioned Raimond.

Both answered in the negative, for they had known the jester as Mahmoud the Moor.

"He must have been before our time," added Henri, incautiously.

"Then you have been with Sir Hugh de Beverly but recently?" persisted the youth.

But the two brigands adhered to their first statement that it was some time ago, pretending to have forgotten just how long it was.

Raimond was not satisfied. He saw it was no use to question the men further. Neither did he speak to Sir Gaston concerning his discovery. The Gaston knight was quick of temper, impulsive in action, and the boy feared that he would perhaps

make matters worse with his threats, and their fulfilment, too, did the men prove obstinate. So he visited the soldiers' quarters still oftener, treating Henri and Guillaume with particular favor.

One day he said confidently:

"I have heard much of the valor of the Red Knight; and of his dexterity with the sword and lance, as well as of his strength with the battle-axe. If my lord, Sir Gaston, would but meet him in open field, he'd show him that though dexterous, strong, and brave, there was one yet more dexterous, strong, and brave than he. Ah, but it would be a pretty combat!"

"The Red Knight can unseat any knight that strides a horse, even the redoubtable Breton knight, Sir Bertrand du Guesclin," answered Henri, stoutly.

"I would have to see it before I would believe that," replied Raimond.

Then Henri and Guillaume, each trying to outdo the other in loudness of speech and vehemence of gesture, began to relate some of the remarkable achievements of their late lord; and the marvellousness of the deeds, one may be sure, lost nothing in the telling.

"And where may the Red Knight now be? Did I but inform my lord of Ambricicourt, he would send him a challenge, and perhaps they would arrange for a tourney."

"No doubt he is at St. Brice. If not, the seneschal

would know where to get word to him," replied Henri, who was the more impulsive of the two men.

"When did you leave him there?"

"In faith, we left when he was not there," replied Henri.

"Then," said Raimond, quickly, "you journeyed from St. Brice to Bocasse?"

"Yes," answered Henri, finally cornered.

"Why did neither of you say so before? It would have put gold into your pouches."

"How so?" they asked.

"Sir Gaston will reward largely any one who can give him news from St. Brice," replied Raimond.

After receiving this information, the fugitives showed no lack of communicativeness. They proved themselves very willing to tell all they knew about St. Brice, Sir Hugh, the household, the Moorish dwarf, and mentioned their companions in the attempted evasion, not forgetting the two pages. They told the story of their escape from the time they left St. Brice until they met Sir Gaston and his company.

Raimond, after listening to all they had to tell, lost no time in repeating what he had heard to Sir Gaston, who warmly praised the boy for showing so much skill and wisdom in the way he had obtained this valuable information. He sent for Henri and Guillaume at once, and questioned them about the fortifications and defences of St. Brice, and of the

plan and arrangement of the château—of its garrison, its inner defences; in short, gained such important knowledge as would serve him well in his premeditated attack. But from what they said, he saw that it would be useless for him to attempt to attack the château with his present force. Nothing but an army equipped with all besieging apparatus could even hope to capture the château, so strongly was it fortified, so effectively were its approaches defended. He must, therefore, apply for aid to King Charles of Navarre, who was under feudal obligation to succor his vassal in her time of need.

* * * * * * *

After taking Limoges, Sir Bertrand had continued to wage war in Limousin, where he received a message from King Charles summoning him to Paris. Now, things had not been prospering in the north of France, for the northern provinces were being laid waste by Sir Robert Knolles, an English captain, who advanced so near Paris that the king could see from his residence, the Hotel Saint-Pol, the smoke of the burning villages fired by the English.

It was in this extremity that King Charles V., at the request of old Constable Moreau de Fiennes, whose infirmities compelled him to resign his honorable position, sent for the Breton knight as the person best qualified to fulfill the duties of this onerous and exalted position.

Disguised as a travelling trader, Sir Bertrand passed

unrecognized through the enemy's lines, and made his way to Paris. Attended by a single squire, and attired very plainly, he unostentatiously rode through the streets of Paris to Hotel St. Pol amid the enthusiastic acclamations of the populace, who were filled with admiration for his valor and success.

King Charles received him with honor and cordiality, surrounded by his ministers and all the high officers of his court. And then only did Sir Bertrand know why he had been summoned to Paris. When the king informed him of his intention to make him Constable of France, Sir Bertrand made answer:

"Most dear and noble king, your good pleasure I dare not resist; but I am come of a lowly house, and it is a necessary part of the duty of the lofty office of constable to bear rule over all, more over those of high degree than those of humble rank. How, then, shall I venture to rule your royal brothers and nephews, who will assume commands in the army? Besides, I fear the envy my advancement will certainly excite. Therefore, I pray you to excuse me from accepting this office, and to bestow it upon another who will take it more willingly and fill it more worthily."

To which the king replied:

"Sir Bertrand, do not on this account seek to decline it. I have neither brother, cousin, nephew, baron, nor count in my kingdom who will not gladly obey you; indeed, if such a one there were, he would

incur my severe displeasure. I pray you, therefore, accept this office."

Not content with thus honoring him, the king entertained Sir Bertrand at a great banquet, made him sit at his own table, and bestowed upon him vast estates.

Once Constable of France, Sir Bertrand devoted all the energy of his great abilities to promoting the best interests of his country, and in doing this he undertook the subjugation of the great captains of the Free Companies, who were again pillaging the people, and sparing neither castle nor town. What the people did not pay in taxes to their own lords and king was taken from them by the English and the Free Companies. King Charles knew he could not fight two such powerful foes at once, so he besought Sir Bertrand to destroy the strongholds of the captains and to buy the services of their followers. So long as knights like Sir Hugh de Beverly were in possession of fortified towns and castles, it was almost impossible either to punish or buy them, for they considered themselves safe from vengeance by reason of their numbers, and privileged because of the eagerness of the opposing parties to secure their co-operation.

Particularly loud and many were the complaints against the Red Knight, so Sir Bertrand determined to make an example of him. He kept himself advised of his movements, and when he learned of his

absence from St. Brice—that absence of which opportunity Joli-cœur had tried to take advantage to rescue Lady Yvette—he immediately started southward with a small body of picked men-at-arms to surprise the château before the lord's return, of which he had not heard.

Du Guesclin had but a hundred men with him, but he knew every one of them to be tried and true. He sent scouts in advance to reconnoitre, and they, meeting a large party of woodcutters, learned that the garrison of St. Brice had made demands upon the neighboring peasants for a large supply of fuel. Hastily returning to Sir Bertrand, they informed him of this opportunity, of which he at once prepared to take advantage.

The next morning, when the woodcutters assembled at the appointed spot in the forest, what was their dismay to find armed men close in about them from the shelter of the dense forest. The peasants made no resistance—they had too much respect for their superiors. Armed with their sharp axes, the brawny fellows could have made a stout fight if it had occurred to them. But they passively yielded to the demands of Sir Bertrand, which were for them to deliver their outer clothing and all the wood they had cut the preceding day. As there were only thirty of the woodcutters, Sir Bertrand selected twenty-nine of his stoutest fighters, bade them follow his example and each put on a woodcutter's

dress over his mail, to take a load of wood on his back, and to accompany him to the castle, which was but a little way from the forest. The remaining men-at-arms were told to prevent the woodcutters from giving the alarm, and to conceal themselves in the woods until they should hear his signal, to which they were to respond as quickly as possible.

It was still early in the morning, before the inhabitants of the castle were about, when Sir Bertrand and his brave men presented themselves before its barriers in the guise of woodcutters.

The warders opened the castle gates to them without parley, as they were aware of the requisition upon the peasants for wood. Sir Bertrand entered first, and with bowed head and body trudged on under his heavy load until all were inside; then he and his men threw down their loads so the gates could not be closed. Casting off his disguise, Du Guesclin drew his sword, shouting his battle-cry:

"Guesclin! Forward, my friends, forward!"

Immediately the garrison began to pour forth, arming themselves as they ran.

"Come on, you Sons of Evil!" shouted Sir Bertrand. "Here's your wood, which shall cost you dear. It is to warm your bath, and it is with your blood that we shall fill your tub!"

Hurling back his challenge, the garrison set upon him and his companions. They were much more numerous than he was prepared for, on account of

Sir Hugh's unexpected return. But the remainder of his company, not awaiting his signal, had rushed up to the castle as soon as they had seen their leader pass the barriers, and dashing in through the gates, thus enabled him to hold his position. The conflict was a severe one, and was obstinately contested. To his utter amazement, and interfering with his calculations, Sir Bertrand found himself face to face with Sir Hugh, whom he recognized by the crest upon his helmet and the device upon his shield.

The garrison were decidedly getting the better of the fight, and the attacking force found themselves at a disadvantage. It was impossible for them to retreat or advance, as they were hemmed in on all sides. But they did not heed their danger, for in those days fighting was a hand-to-hand combat, there being really no concerted action. It was for that reason that personal prowess and valor were rated so highly. In hand-to-hand conflicts no one thought of his neighbor, noticed no one but his assailant. Du Guesclin, who had laid many a combatant low with his powerful battle-axe, had fared hardly, though he was but dimly aware of the fact that one arm was broken, and was conscious of the wound in his forehead only because of the blood that flowed from it, which, getting into his eyes, half blinded him. He was now engaged with Sir Hugh himself, who was unhurt and was fighting with a maniacal fury. Taking his battle-axe with both hands, he

brought it down with all his might upon Sir Bertrand, who, raising his battle-axe at the same instant, found it broken in his hand from the blow it had intercepted.

At that moment the tramp of horses would have been heard had any stopped to listen. Sir Bertrand had taken the precaution to station outposts, fearing Sir Hugh might get hint of his movements and return to the rescue of his castle. The situation was desperate enough as it was, and should the newcomers prove to be allies of Sir Hugh's, it would be all up with Du Guesclin and his men. The outposts' duty was to prevent any succor, so, putting on a bold front, one of them shouted to the newcomers:

"If you are not for King Charles of France, if you are English, fly! For were you double your numbers, you will all be slain, for Bertrand du Guesclin and five hundred French with him are confessing the English!"

"We are friends!" cried the foremost one.

And lucky enough it was for Du Guesclin at that moment that Lady Yvette had so loyal and brave a kinght for a lover as Sir Gaston d'Ambricicourt, as it was no other than he who headed a small army that had come to get possession of the Lady of Bocasse.

The garrison yielded after a brief struggle, when it realized the strength of the reinforcement of the

Breton knight. So Sir Hugh de Beverly was taken prisoner in his own château where he had so long ruled with the heavy hand of a tyrant. Those of the garrison who were not wounded were turned adrift with scant ceremony, to find subsistence as best they might. The wounded were carried to the guard room in the soldiers' quarters, while Sir Hugh was taken to the keep and placed in one of the upper chambers, with guards posted outside the door. Sir Bertrand expected that the knight would be allowed to purchase his liberty, but the amount of his ransom was not yet fixed. Perchance, too, the king of France would prefer to keep him a close prisoner till the present war with the English was ended, that he might not further harass the French.

As soon as order was restored, Sir Gaston asked permission of Sir Bertrand to question the Red Knight concerning the Lady of Bocasse. Sir Bertrand, who had just had his wounds dressed and his broken arm set, not only gave his consent for Sir Gaston to see his prisoner, but declared he should accompany him.

Sir Hugh was pacing the floor of his room like some enraged wild beast that had been captured and caged. He paused in his walk as the two knights entered the chamber, and glared savagely at them without returning their greeting.

"We have come, Sir Knight," began Sir Bertrand courteously, "to inquire concerning a certain lady

whom you hold for ransom, that the terms thereof may be arranged and the said lady recover her liberty."

The Red Knight regarded Sir Bertrand for a moment without making reply, then said shortly:

"You have come too late."

"What do you mean?" shouted Sir Gaston.

"'Tis by her own choice she remains with me," he replied, shortly.

"Explain, that I may understand you," said Sir Gaston, with forced calmness; he had a terrible fear that the Red Knight might have succeeded where he had failed.

But Sir Hugh took no notice of him.

Sir Gaston was not a patient man, and sprang upon Sir Hugh, exclaiming:

"Speak, I tell you!"

Sir Hugh was unarmed, but he prepared to defend himself. However, Sir Bertrand tried to separate them, saying:

"Knights should not fight with teeth and claws like wild beasts. Seek satisfaction in knightly fashion on the field of honor, but leave to dogs the manner of dogs."

But the two enraged men would not listen to the voice of reason, and continued to struggle together like the dogs to which Sir Bertrand had compared them. By a thrust of his foot the constable succeeded in tripping them up, then he proceeded calmly

to seat himself on the back of the uppermost man, which chanced to be Sir Gaston. This double weight nearly suffocated Sir Hugh, while Sir Gaston could not dislodge the burly constable and fight Sir Hugh at the same time; consequently, Sir Bertrand succeeded in making them both listen to what he had to say.

He permitted them to rise, but was interrupted by what seemed to be shrieks of agony.

"Whence do those cries proceed?" he asked.

Sir Hugh made no answer, save to smooth his beard with a satisfied air.

"Hast thou prisoners below?" persisted Sir Bertrand.

"Thou hast conquered the castle and made its lord captive. Now make thyself master of their secrets," replied Sir Hugh, coolly.

"By St. Ives and the Blessed Virgin, that will I do!" exclaimed Sir Bertrand, and motioning to Sir Gaston to follow him, he left the chamber, ordering the guards to lock the door and to have a strict watch maintained day and night. Then he proceeded to investigate. The keep was a large building, and as the apartment where Sir Hugh was confined was on the second floor above the ground, if the cries came from the underground dungeon, there must be some communication between them.

"A watch must be set also at the exit of the dun-

geons," said Sir Bertrand, "else may our prisoner escape by means of a secret passage. Where is the warder?"

That officer was near at hand.

"Conduct us to your prisoners," directed the constable.

Down steep stone steps, through damp narrow passages, the warder led the way. Then he unlocked a heavy oaken door that creaked dismally on its hinges as it was flung back. The shrieks that had not been heard in the corridor above now sounded shrilly, but the cell was empty, though showing signs of recent occupancy. At the farther end was another door. This also the warder unlocked; and when opened, the cries sounded still louder. In the centre of this apartment was a round hole, and it was from the bottom of this hole whence came the shrieks, now growing fainter, evidently from weakness. The stench was overpowering. All was as dark as midnight save where the torch carried by the warder's attendant cast an uncertain flickering light.

"Are there human beings below?" asked Sir Bertrand.

"They were put there before daylight," answered the warder.

"How may we descend?" inquired Sir Bertrand.

"By means of this ladder," was the reply.

"We will go below," declared the constable.

The ladder had been leaning against the wall. It was brought forward and lowered into the hole.

"Descend first," said Sir Bertrand to the warder.

As that officer showed no hesitancy to do Sir Bertrand's bidding, the constable followed him. Once at the bottom, what a sight the flickering light of the torch revealed!

Great hairy bodies of huge rats were seen scurrying hither and thither in their effort to escape the unusual intrusion. The earthen floor was strewn with human bones from which the flesh had long since been gnawed. Stone posts stood at intervals in this grewsome chamber, and from these hung chains to which were attached strips of what had once been clothing and fragments of fleshless bones. that had once been part of human bodies.

The cries that had ceased for a moment now started anew. They came from one corner of the apartment. Picking his way through this charnel house, Sir Bertrand found a twisted, misshapen little figure bound to one of the posts. It was Joli-cœur.

Despite one broken arm, the wound in his forehead, and his desperate fight of the early morning, Sir Bertrand had still strength enough to cleave with his sword the chains that held the faithful Joli-cœur, who fell in a heap at his feet, his broken legs being unable to bear the weight of his body. The Breton knight commanded the warder to raise him and carry

him in his arms to some place where he could be properly cared for. As the warder picked up the dwarf in his arms, the latter gave a cry of pain.

"Oh, take heed, good master, take heed! My poor bones are broken in many places! But there is another at the farther end. Succor her also, I beseech you, ere it be too late!"

One of the attendants now carried the torch, and him Sir Bertrand bade lead the way to the corner designated by Joli-cœur. There they found Jeanne-Marie also chained to a stone post, but her head rested upon her breast, so they could not see her face, and she made no sign at their approach. Looking closely at her, Sir Bertrand said:

"She is already dead."

When Sir Gaston saw Joli-cœur, he at once recognized him from Raimond's description. Impatiently he waited while they carried him to a room that contained a bed. Once he was laid thereon, Sir Gaston began to question him, but the poor little man could not answer, for he had fainted. Sir Gaston did not tarry while they revived him, but made inquiries of the first person he met, who fortunately proved to be the seneschal.

"Is there not a noble lady, a prisoner, within the château, messire?" he asked.

"Yes, my lord; 'tis the Lady Yvette, once the Lady of Bocasse, whom Sir Hugh expects to make his wife."

"Can I not have speech with her?"

"That is as Sir Bertrand commands, for he now is lord of St. Brice and all it contains."

"Surely the lady may be informed that a friend craves the privilege of greeting her," said Sir Gaston, impatiently.

At this moment Sir Bertrand appeared, and when the Gascon knight explained the situation and his request to see the lady, he said at once:

"Inform the lady that she is free to stay or to return to her home, as she pleases, and also that two knights crave sight and speech of her."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT LIMOGES.

It was the wife of the seneschal who took the message of Sir Bertrand to the Lady of Bocasse. This good dame had felt strongly for the young girl, whom she knew had been offered an alternative to her marriage with the Red Knight that was worse than death. She experienced no great disappointment when she found that the French had successfully surprised the castle, for she was French by birth and at heart. Joyfully she took her way to the lady's chamber, eager to make known to her the glad tidings of her rescue. She put the key into the lock and turned it with difficulty, exclaiming as she opened the door:

"Oh, madame, madame, may God be thanked, and the Holy Mother and all the Saints, that this good thing has happened!"

As she saw the girl stretched out upon the floor, her face the hue of death, the woman gave a cry of fear. Stooping, she put her fingers to the white throat to feel if the heart still beat. A slight flutter told her life was not extinct. She called to her

women, and together they lifted the now slight form and laid it tenderly upon the bed. The swoon was a long one. More than once the women who were working over Lady Yvette almost gave up hope. Still they persevered, and were at length rewarded by returning consciousness. Suffering, lack of sleep and food, had told heavily upon the girl, and it was over a week before Dame Radegonde told her of the knights' message.

But Lady Yvette showed a strange reluctance to seeing her rescuers. She asked them to wait a little. She had her own reasons for this request which she did not explain. She ascribed her escape to the intercession of Sainte Marie, and to show her gratitude for her deliverance and to do penance for her determination to take her own life before enduring the ignominy of the Red Knight's vengeance, she had resolved to see no one until she had visited the shrine of the Blessed Virgin, and there had registered a vow to erect a fitting memorial to her, as substantial evidence of her adoration and gratitude.

Through the seneschal's wife she sent thanks to the two knights for their succor, and also special acknowledgment to Sir Gaston for his recovery of Bocasse.

When Sir Gaston again begged to see her, she returned reply:

"Not yet; there are some things first to be done."

Then, in his disappointment, Sir Gaston jumped

at the conclusion that the Red Knight had succeeded where he had failed, and he begged permission of the constable to permit him to send a challenge to Sir Hugh to meet him in single combat. Sir Bertrand gave his consent. Raimond was bidden convey the message, but he returned after a short absence with the startling announcement that the Red Knight was no longer in the chamber where he had been confined under a strict guard. This information was instantly conveyed to Sir Bertrand, who sent for the warder and demanded why he had allowed the prisoner to escape.

"He was there, my lord, when his food was taken him this morning. I had four men on guard in whom I can put full reliance, and who swear that no one has entered or left the apartment since he was given his breakfast, except the damoiseau sent by Sir Gaston, and who brought an order from you. Then when the door was opened, it was found that Sir Hugh was no longer within."

"Then is he in hiding," said Sir Bertrand. "Search the secret passage leading from his room to the dungeon below."

This was done with no result.

"There is, no doubt, some secret door," exclaimed the seneschal, after all places had been searched, "of which he only knows. He has many trusty *serviteurs* who could effect his escape from the château, once he was outside his room."

The one most strongly affected by this news was Sir Gaston. The constable was in possession of the castle, which was the main thing to him; but the Gascon knight had been foiled of his vengeance.

When Lady Yvette was questioned in regard to her last imprisonment when none had been permitted to visit her, she would shudder, shake her head and remain silent. Never did she speak of Sir Hugh's dreadful threat or of his visit. The memory of both was seared upon her brain, and the horror burned upon her heart, but of them she never spoke except at confessional, where she received comfort and absolution.

She was soon ready and eager to return to Bocasse. There would she thank and reward her lover for his gallant services, did he still crave the guerdon he had once begged.

While Lady Yvette had been recovering from her illness and trying to make her peace with offended Heaven, there had come to St. Brice a knight riding at full speed from Limoges, saying that the Black Prince had laid siege to that town, and though unable to sit a horse on account of illness, had himself carried in a litter about the fortifications that he might personally direct operations for taking the town, for hot was his heart with anger against the people of Limoges. The people were much alarmed and wished to surrender, but the French captains, who were in command of the garrison, would not

permit a capitulation, for the city was well fortified and could not be taken by assault, and the garrison was large and prepared to resist to the last. However, the knight had succeeded in making his escape from the town and had come to implore Sir Bertrand to engage the enemy in the rear while the garrison sallied forth from the town and attacked them in front. Sir Bertrand had disbanded his army of the south and had retained only about two hundred lances. Of these he had but a small portion with him. It was impossible to leave St. Brice before he had razed its fortifications, neither could he spare any of his men. Sir Gaston immediately gave orders for his company to prepare for the enterprise, and off he set that very day to go to the aid of Limoges.

Much would Sir Gaston have given for a sight of Lady Yvette's fair face ere parting, but he was too proud to ask again for that which had already been refused him.

When Sir Gaston was well on his way, the Navarrese members of his company declared their purpose of returning to their king, who had lent them to fight Sir Hugh de Beverly and not the Black Prince; for so great was the reputation of the English prince, that few were willing to fight against him unless in company with double the number of the English army under his command. Sir Gaston was helpless; he could not force the men-at-arms to remain with

him, as his own men formed much the smaller portion of his company, but he would not allow their action to influence his. Therefore, with his small company, he reached Limoges in due time, and managed to effect an entrance—sieges being loosely conducted in those days, as it was almost impossible to surround a city so as wholly to invest it.

The addition of so gallant a company was very welcome to the inhabitants of Limoges, who joyfully celebrated their coming. The two military commanders, the governor of the citadel and the captain of the garrison conferred, and agreed to attempt to drive the English away from the walls by a sortie, for with the addition of Sir Gaston's company they had a fair-sized army, though not nearly so large as that of the English; but having the gates of the city in their rear and supported by the crossbowmen on the walls, they could retire in time to save a rout.

But all this time the Black Prince's miners were at work, and the very morning for which the sortie had been planned, a large portion of the town walls was thrown down, to the utter confusion of the garrison and the consternation of the inhabitants. A terrible fight followed. Sir Gaston, as usual, was in the thickest part of it. No quarter was given or asked; the Black Prince had threatened the complete extermination of the inhabitants, did not the city capitulate. Therefore, the garrison knew it was victory or death. It was death, not only to them, but

to the innocent populace who had no voice in the direction of affairs, not having advised the former surrender to Sir Bertrand, and later having favored a capitulation to their former lord.

The Black Prince, already suffering from his fatal illness—gaunt, cadaverous, unrelenting, so weak that he could not engage actively in the attack, being carried in his litter from point to point—showed no mercy to the inhabitants of Limoges. As the troops poured into the city, he witnessed with his own eyes the execution of his orders that no man, woman, nor child should be spared. Nor was his heart to pity stirred when women and children fell on their knees before him, crying:

"Mercy, mercy, sweet sir!"

For a time mercy had died in his heart, and he was deaf to the pleadings of the helpless. Froissart, whose respect for the successful, admiration for the strong and valiant, high regard for the rich and noble, outran his sympathy for the lowly, in this case had his heart wrung with pity for the fate of the poor people of Limoges. He writes:

"I do not know how they could not have had pity for the poor people, who were guilty of no treason; but they paid more dearly for it than the great masters who had committed the offence. There is no one so hard-hearted, who, if he had been in the city of Limoges and had been mindful of God, could not have wept tenderly at the great misery which was

done there, for more than three thousand persons, men, women, and children, were seized and put to death that day. God has their souls, for they were true martyrs."

There were three knights, however, whose desperate resistance won the favor of the Black Prince, who was always an admirer of valor, and one of these was Sir Gaston d'Ambricicourt, once of his court of Bordeaux. When Sir Gaston was finally forced to surrender and obliged to take off his visor in the presence of the Black Prince, he had expected nothing less than death on account of his participation in the Gascon revolt. Instead, the Black Prince saluted him courteously, and ordered that he be confined in the citadel and strongly guarded; so imprisonment was all Sir Gaston got for his pains in seeking to relieve Limoges.

As Sir Gaston was being conducted to the citadel, whom should he meet face to face but Sir Hugh de Beverly, whose countenance betrayed the satisfaction he felt at witnessing the discomfiture of the Gascon knight. Hurling defiance at the Red Knight, Sir Gaston taunted him with his flight from St. Brice, accusing him of being afraid to encounter him, and of running away to avoid a combat. But before Sir Hugh had time to reply, Sir Gaston was hurried on by the guards.

The prisoner had no cause to complain of his treatment, save that his liberty was not given him on

parole, neither was the amount of his ransom fixed. Visitors were allowed him, with whom he played chess and backgammon and threw dice; but it was an irksome life for one brought up to arms and eager to emulate the gallant example of the Black Prince and the Breton knight.

He made many inquiries concerning Sir Hugh, and learned that he was in high favor at the Bordeaux court, not only on account of the large number of men-at-arms he could bring to the prince's service, but also on account of his prowess and valor.

"'Tis strange what takes a woman's fancy," mused Sir Gaston more than once when he found himself alone. "The lady hath need of no more domains. Bocasse is sufficient unto her needs and pride. Here am I, as doughty a warrior as Sir Hugh, but not so powerful, because I have not so many men to respond to my beck and call. *Pardie*, the lady hath no doubt of the English knight's love, because he hath more than she can give; and even that which she hath she may forfeit should not King Charles of Navarre be content to allow an English knight to become his vassal."

Every day Sir Gaston expected a messenger to arrive from the Black Prince fixing the amount of his ransom; but the days came and went without sign from the Lord of Aquitaine.

The weeks passed drearily enough to the Gascon knight, who bewailed the hardness of his fate.

Twice had he been a prisoner within a short time, and once had he been laid up with the hurt of his wounds received in battle, losing much valuable time, for he feared a truce would be declared before he had advanced his fortunes.

One morning, not quite two months after the massacre of Limoges, there came news that the eldest son of the Black Prince, a boy of six years, heir to the English throne, had died at Bordeaux. Sorely did the father grieve over the loss of his first born, whom he had expected to succeed his illustrious grandfather, Edward III.; for the valiant prince knew that the conqueror of all men had him at his mercy, and would not stay his hand long enough for him to ascend the English throne. His doctors advised the prince to return home in hopes that in his native land, away from the associations in Aquitaine, he could fight death a little longer.

Then Sir Gaston deemed himself forgotten. The regaining of his liberty would now depend upon himself. Fortunately Raimond was allowed to visit him. Gold would unlock prison doors if he had enough of it. Plenty there was of his at Bocasse in charge of Messire de Bonciel. Raimond should journey thither and bring him ample for his needs, perchance also a comforting word from the Lady of Bocasse. Ah, no! Had he not been told that she had elected rather to remain at St. Brice, and had she denied the story or sent him word. But why had

she attempted the terrible sin of self-destruction? A horrible suspicion entered Sir Gaston's soul. By the Holy Sepulchre, he would yet meet Sir Hugh face to face, hand to hand, and one of them would bite the dust!

CHAPTER XIX.

A STORMY INTERVIEW.

When Sir Hugh de Beverly recognized Sir Gaston d'Ambricicourt, it set him to thinking. Why had he attacked St. Brice? Why had he become wroth with Sir Hugh because he declined to answer Sir Bertrand's inquiries concerning Lady Yvette? Perhaps in this could he discover the reason of the lady's persistent disdain. Calling to him one of his squires, he bade him go learn all he could concerning this Gascon knight, to make friends with his friends if such he had in town, and bring him news of what he had been doing these past few years.

Vivien de Sellac, the squire entrusted with this mission, had already met Raimond at St. Brice, where he had been captured with the rest of the Red Knight's suite and held for ransom, which had been paid. Therefore, he repaired to Raimond's lodgings near the citadel where Sir Gaston was confined, and there learned that the young gentleman had departed that very morning with a small company of men-at-arms for the south.

"What part of the south?" queried Vivien.

"Somewhere in the kingdom of Navarre, so one of his men informed me, where Sir Gaston captured a château, which had been taken by an English captain who had carried off its lady."

Vivien waited to hear no more, but reported at once to his lord.

Sir Hugh had been duly informed of the recapture of Bocasse, but had not given the matter much thought, for he had secured the treasure, had its lady a prisoner, and was in need of all his men just at that period. When the time came, he would go again to Bocasse and seize it; but the time was not yet ripe.

Now it flashed upon his memory that the knight who had taken Bocasse was a Gascon, once a vassal of the Black Prince; no doubt it was the same man.

"He shall have neither Bocasse nor its lady! I'll betake myself to Bordeaux and pay the knight's ransom; then shall he be my prisoner. St. Brice will I again take, also Bocasse and the châtelaine of Bocasse; and the knight and the lady shall be partners in the other's fate."

And thus it was that it came to pass one morning when Sir Gaston was in a hopeful frame of mind, for the time had come when Raimond might be expected at any moment to return from Bocasse, that the warder opened the door of his apartment and announced:

"A visitor for Sir Gaston."

Sir Gaston, thinking it to be Raimond, sprang up with alacrity to greet him; instead, a stranger stood at the door. Bowing courteously, he said:

"I have come, Sir Knight, to escort you on a journey. A thousand pardons that time has not been given you for preparation, but my instructions have just arrived, and coming from one higher than myself, must be obeyed at once. We are to start in an hour's time."

"Whither?" asked Sir Gaston.

"That I am not permitted to say," replied the stranger knight.

"What if I should decline departing?"

"Then I must go against my feelings and conduct you forcibly."

"Humph!" muttered Sir Gaston. "A prisoner may not determine the manner of his going and coming, nor the time. *Tiens*, I shall be ready, Sir Knight."

The stranger knight bowed and retired.

Sir Gaston pondered how he might inform Raimond of his change of residence. As he himself did not know his destination, he could not leave a message to his squire whither to follow him. What was the object of his removal? Perhaps he was to be taken to the Black Prince to Bordeaux. 'Twas strange his ransom had not been fixed. Could it be he was to be punished as a rebel, that he was to be made an example to other dissatisfied vassals?

He was arrayed in travelling garb at the end of an hour, but no one came to lead him forth. He was impatient to be gone, for he had thought of a way to enable Raimond to follow him. He would make a pretext of speaking to some villagers on the way, stop at huts on the road and let fall some remarks that would apprise the astute youth that he had recently passed that way; for he knew Raimond would try to follow him whithersoever he might be taken, obtaining what clew he could in town and neighborhood.

Daylight waned, his meals were sent him as usual, but no word came from him who was to conduct him he knew not whither. At length, when it was quite dark, the summons came; and Sir Gaston was taken on a midnight journey on a starless night, over a road with so many windings and turnings that the knight could not tell whether he were going north, south, east, or west. They travelled rapidly, changing horses once, but as they were awaiting them outside the posthouse Sir Gaston could get word with nobody. Before dawn they came up to the gates of a fortified town. A blast of the horn brought the warder to the tower over the gate. A word from the leader of the party, whose face Sir Gaston had not seen, but whose voice seemed not altogether unfamiliar, brought the warder down, and a few moments later they entered the town through the smaller gate.

The party dismounted, and Sir Gaston was conducted into one of the towers that flanked the gate, and up, it seemed to him, an interminable winding stone stairway. At length the warder stopped before a door; selecting a key from the great bunch he carried, he put it in the lock, turned it, and opened the door, revealing by the light of the flaring torch a gloomy apartment, with a great open fireplace, a heap of straw and a wooden bench; while in the centre of the floor was a large round opening. Into this room Sir Gaston was thrust without a word, the door was shut, the lock turned, and he was left there alone and in the dark, afraid to move lest he fall through the opening.

Stooping to the floor, he felt carefully about him, and then on all fours crept toward where he thought the straw was. Instead, one hand gave way; he had reached the hole! The sudden giving way of the floor, as it seemed, so startled him that he concluded to sit where he was till morning; for being so high up, he felt reasonably sure it was no dark dungeon in which he was confined.

The next hour passed slowly; then the first faint streaks of dawn appeared, and presently he could discern the outlines of the chamber. He threw himself on the pile of straw and was soon fast asleep. It was long past noon when he awoke. It was a moment or two before he took in his situation. He sat up on his bed of straw and gazed around him,

bewildered. Where was he? The room was comparatively large, but was bare of all comfort or conveniences save the open fireplace, the narrow, slit-like openings through the thick walls to admit the light, and the circular hole in the floor, the use of which was now evident, for a rope and pulley arrangement conveyed, by means of buckets, food and drink to the captive in his eyrie. The memory of the events of the past night quickly returned. He arose, went toward the buckets that were suspended above the hole, and found water in one and bread and meat in the other. He detached both buckets, set them on the floor, then examined the rope and pulley to see if they would bear his weight. He soon satisfied himself that they were just stout enough for the weight they were intended to lift, and no more.

He took the food out one pail, and poured half of the contents of the other bucket into it for drink; the rest of the water he reserved for his ablutions. After refreshing himself with a good wash, as well as with food and drink, he attempted to look out the windows, but they were high above his head. He pulled the bench under one of them, thus bringing his eyes on a level with the sill. All he could see through the dark narrow aperture were the blue skies. He threw himself flat on the floor, and drawing himself along till his head projected over the hole, he peered below. He could distinguish nothing but

yawning blackness, as if the opening descended to the bowels of the earth.

Thus he was left day after day, hearing nothing, seeing no one, the only event of every twenty-four hours being the raising and lowering of the buckets. He tried to devise some means of communication with those who attended him, then desisted lest he do himself more harm than good thereby.

He tried to keep track of the days, but after a while became a little confused, so he could not tell to the day how long he had been confined in the tower, when, to his joy, he heard the key turn in the lock and saw the door open to admit a visitor. Springing up to greet the newcomer, he advanced a step; then his joy suddenly changed to wrath, for he beheld the ugly countenance of Sir Hugh de Beverly.

The two men stood facing each other like two combatants that seem to be taking measure each of his adversary before striking out. Sir Gaston spoke first.

"*Eh bien!* Why do you come here?" he asked, defiantly.

"To see Messire d'Ambricicourt, whom I hold my prisoner," answered Sir Hugh, with an evil smile.

"'Tis a lie! I yielded myself to his royal highness, the Prince of Aquitaine."

"Who in turn has made you over to me, for I have paid your ransom. Am I not generous?"

"For what purpose?" demanded the Gascon knight.

"To suit my humor," replied the Red Knight.

"Name the sum you require, and it shall be yours," said the captive, proudly.

"You have not gold sufficient to buy your liberty. All the treasure of La Tayac would not purchase it."

"You do me honor to rate me so highly," replied Sir Gaston.

"*Sangdieu*, 'tis my vengeance that comes dear! Dost think I'll bear the loss of Bocasse, of my treasure at Tayac, the raid upon St. Brice, and have naught in return?"

"Such are the fortunes of war."

"Aye; but fortune's wheel ever turns. Listen, I took Bocasse; its châtelaine tried to ransom her castle; I took the ransom, the castle, and the lady. Thou seek'st to buy thy freedom with my gold; I shall recover my gold by recapturing Bocasse and also repossess myself of its lady; aye, and what is more, without striking a blow."

"Explain yourself in regard to the lady!" exclaimed Sir Gaston, hotly.

"I'll enter upon explanations only as far as it shall please me. And it pleases me to tell you that at St. Brice, where the Lady of Bocasse remained some time my guest, her apartment was next my own; a secret door connected them. Is Sir Hugh a man to neglect such opportunities? Is not the Lady Yvette

a woman to recognize and admire valor and success?"

Sir Gaston, with a single leap, was at the Red Knight's throat. But Sir Hugh was ready for him, and struck at his arm with the flat of his sword.

"Stand back!" he exclaimed. "The time has not yet come when I desire to kill you. There are some things yet in store for you."

Sir Gaston's hands dropped to his side. What could he do unarmed against a man heavier than himself and armed at all points?

"No; I'll not die yet!" he exclaimed. "Not till I am out of this. Then will I seek you far and near, and not rest content till the earth covers you!"

Sir Hugh laughed—a laugh that sent the blood coursing through Sir Gaston's veins so furiously that it seemed as though his heart would burst its bony casement.

"Listen!" said the Red Knight. "Once I intended making the Lady Yvette my wife, and set her high above the ladies of the land; but I have changed my purpose. You and she shall meet again. How and when and where, it is I who will decide. Let that be a hope unto you!"

But instead of being a promise of hope to bring joy to the heart of the lover, the manner of its saying sent a deathly chill into his blood; and now instead of racing at furious speed through his veins, it seemed to settle in his chest and suffocate him. Was she

also in his power? He thought to have rescued her!

Sir Hugh said no more, but his sneering laugh came back to Sir Gaston as the door shut him out from his sight.

This visit did not render Sir Gaston's captivity the more endurable. 'Twas better to be forgotten by the Black Prince than to be remembered by the Red Knight. Could it be possible that he had been transferred to the custody of Sir Hugh? If so, he had everything to fear—nothing to hope. As to Lady Yvette, he had left her under the protection of Sir Bertrand, and he refused to believe that she had ever shown favor to the suit of a man so base as the Red Knight had proved himself to be. Oh, that he still lived to boast again of favors he had not received!

Many times did Sir Gaston carefully and patiently examine every inch of wall and floor of his cell in the vain hope of finding some way out! He tried to squeeze through one of the narrow openings that served as windows, to see if he could not reach the platform above, and thus discover some means of escape, and in his efforts very nearly wedged himself solidly between the blocks of stone. Often was he tempted to throw himself headlong through the opening in the floor. But should he kill himself, who would there be to punish the Red Knight?

The days and nights dragged slowly by. One

day there came no food nor drink to him, nor the next day, nor yet the next. Did Sir Hugh intend that he should die of starvation, or was he compelling him to fast that his strength might be reduced and his spirit broken?

CHAPTER XX.

THE WHITE KNIGHT.

THERE came into the town of Blanc one fair day a goodly cavalcade. First rode several squires carrying the armor of their lord, while two led by the bridle rein two fiery chargers most handsomely caparisoned. Following, appeared a knight on a white horse whose housings were of white and silver, while he himself wore an elegant white robe over his suit of mail. As one of his squires carried his helmet, his face was plainly seen. It was that of a young man who must have recently received his knighthood, for its curves were youthful and the upper lip and chin showed signs neither of mustache nor beard. He glanced to the right and left with clear open gaze; and while pride was in his bearing, there was neither haughtiness nor assumption. Behind him rode a small body of men-at-arms, whose accoutrements and horses showed them to belong to some lord with full purse and free hand. Calling to one of his squires, a well formed, handsome youth, looking as old as his lord, the knight gave him instructions in a low voice. The squire galloped off

and was soon lost to sight. The others followed slowly.

Presently the squire was seen returning, and riding up to the White Knight, he bowed and said:

"My lord, lodgings are awaiting you and your train in the principal inn of the town, which happily has no guests, neither will the innkeeper receive any other while you are pleased to remain therein."

"It is good," replied the White Knight. "Lead on."

The munificence of the White Knight was soon the talk of the town. He scattered his gold as freely as did other people dispense copper. As the rank of a knight was estimated by the amount of largess distributed, the delighted townspeople concluded he must be a baron of high degree and great possessions.

But question as one would of his attendants, no hint could he elicit as to whence came the knight or what was his name and title.

"He has particular business, and it does not suit him to be known at present."

"But how may we designate him?"

"By the appellation of the White Knight. It is enough until his mission be concluded."

There were those in the town who resented this reticence, and would have had the knight forced to give a proper account of himself, lest he be an envoy of the enemy, who would in the end work them injury. But these were silenced by others, who were

in a great majority, and who declared that whoever or whatever the White Knight might be, so long as he lavished his gold upon the town, he should be unmolested, for war had sadly interfered with trade and wofully diminished its prosperity.

By and by it was discovered that any proper man or youth who might make application to the White Knight was received into his service, was given handsome apparel and fine accoutrements, fared sumptuously, and received good wages for his hire. So the train of the White Knight grew in number and strength.

Now the Red Knight had been absent from Blanc for a week or more, and what was his surprise on returning to find the White Knight ensconced in the best inn and exceeding him in magnificence and display. The retainers of the two knights were constantly meeting, and seldom without a set-to, and the townspeople made grievous complaint to the governor of street brawls, broken windows, and pillaged shops. But the governor was ill disposed to interfere, for the presence of so many armed men in Blanc, besides the garrison, was good for the town, inasmuch as the Breton knight, Lord Constable of France, had renewed hostilities, and no one knew when it might suit his purpose to descend upon them.

It so happened that the two knights themselves did not meet. At first the White Knight had made himself free with the townspeople, had chatted with

the officers, and spent his money lavishly. His squires, too, were affable, and were always welcomed heartily by the garrison, for they spent money only less freely than their lord, and their entertainments were the talk of Blanc long after they were known no more therein. After the return of Sir Hugh, however, he was little seen.

The Red Knight was biding his opportunity. He did not care to attack the White Knight in the town, for he well knew on which side the populace would be, and they had it in their power materially to interfere with his purpose. So he gave instructions to some of his people to keep themselves informed of the movements of the White Knight and his followers, and to report to him immediately, night or day, if anything unusual should present itself.

Another week passed. Then early one morning Sir Hugh was awakened by a squire, who brought the information that the White Knight was making preparations to leave the city that very morning. Springing from his bed, Sir Hugh gave orders for his men to make ready to follow them. But first was it to be ascertained how large a company attended him.

Now it so happened the White Knight, wishing to make a rapid trip, left most of his men behind, and attended by several of his squires, among whom was not his favorite attendant, for him he left in charge of the rest of his company, departed from the

city as soon as its gates were opened, taking a northerly direction. The day was bright and cold, as it was the winter season, but the roads being far from good, at times their progress was very slow.

They had been travelling about three hours when they approached a crossroads. The country was open, and the White Knight saw a party of horsemen much more numerous than his own galloping toward the road they were taking. His eyes were keen, and the White Knight recognized the banner of the leader, who was no other than Sir Hugh. At once he knew the object of the Red Knight was to intercept him, for the road he was travelling also led to the town he had just left, but was some miles longer. From the foam-covered sides of the animals, he could see they had been kept at top speed. His horses and those of his men were comparatively fresh If they could reach the intersection of the roads first, he was sure he and his men could outride Sir Hugh and his party. The White Knight spoke to his men, then to his horse, and the company swept down the road like a whirlwind. It was a race for life. When the Red Knight perceived the intention of the company he was pursuing to evade him, he, too, shouted lustily to his men, dug the spurs deeper into the quivering flanks of his horse, and tried to head them off. Closer and closer they approached; to his dismay the White Knight saw he had underrated the staying qualities of the horses of his adversary, for

adversary he knew him to be. On swept both parties. A misstep of a single steed might precipitate a dozen men and horses in a heap. But the beasts were surefooted and seemed to partake of the excitement and spirit of their riders. Too late the White Knight saw there would be a meeting, which was impossible to avoid. He could only trust to fortune. Harder and harder he pressed his horse, his men being close about him. Faster came Sir Hugh at the head of his company. On they all rode, till there was a terrific shock of horse against horse just at the intersection. Back on their haunches were flung the horses of Sir Hugh's company, almost throwing the horses of the White Knight and his men. Then recovering themselves, there was a furious charge from Sir Hugh's side, but the White Knight and his men had not stopped to receive it, as they were speeding down the road at a break-neck gallop. In a moment Sir Hugh and his party followed, and the race was renewed. Mile after mile galloped pursuer and pursued, but the pursued gradually increased the distance between them, until at length Sir Hugh saw the futility of keeping up the pursuit.

However, if he could not avenge himself on the master, he might on his men; so returning to the town, which he reached at nightfall, he determined in the morning to attack and capture that part of the White Knight's company which he had left behind.

Accordingly, the following morning the inn where

the company was lodged and its range of outbuildings were surrounded by a company of armed men, who called upon those within to surrender.

"If you want us, come and get us," shouted one of the squires.

"Aye, that we will!" was the answer.

But doors were rapidly barricaded, great oaken chests and tables were stacked behind them, other barricades arose quickly at the head of the stairs leading to the second story, archers were placed at the narrow windows, and so true was their aim that the enthusiasm of the on-lookers as well as the attackers was soon considerably diminished.

In vain the innkepeer protested against this use, or rather abuse, of his property; he was answered by the squire who was in command during his lord's absence, who said that for every denier's damage two should be given. Thereupon the good man was as zealous as the rest, offering up all his property, for great as was the destruction double would be the indemnity.

As the inn was in a busy section of the town, the attack proved quite a diversion for the townspeople, though the more timid of the citizens sent a deputation to the governor begging him to despatch the garrison to quell the disturbance. But the governor refused to interfere. All day the attack continued with considerable loss of life without from the darts shot from within.

Then Sir Hugh sent to the governor for a battering ram, but again he refused to interfere. It was his duty to keep the foe from entering the city; let the city magistrates preserve peace within its walls.

The next day the attack was renewed. Sir Hugh had obtained some attacking apparatus which he directed against both walls and doors. The inn was not intended to repel attacks of such a nature, and the masonry soon began to give. With shouts of exultation the attackers pressed forward with increased energy. Doors were beaten down and an entrance forced. Then came a desperate hand-to-hand fight in the passages, the forcing of more barriers, the crashing of doors, smashing of heavy oaken furniture, clashing of steel, the shouting and shrieking of men. So engrossed were they that they did not notice the clanging of the alarm bell, nor the commotion in the streets without, that was even greater than the noise and confusion within.

CHAPTER XXI.

LIMOGES AVENGED.

As soon as Sir Bertrand du Guesclin was invested with full powers of the highest military office in France, he began systematic preparations for prosecuting with vigor the war against the English. He ordered new engines of war, as well as a large supply of arms of every description, thus gladdening the hearts of the manufacturers; he put Paris in a better state of defence, issued new regulations to the army, and established a discipline and effected an organization that had before been lacking. More than that, he had succeeded in eliciting from the king and his ministers a final promise that the troops should receive regular pay.

His preparations being under way, he assumed the offensive, and instead of avoiding regular engagements, as had been the policy of the French since the memorable defeat at Poitiers, he attacked the English with a vigor and a suddenness for which they were entirely unprepared. It was winter time, too, and the English, knowing the disinclination of the French nobles to endure the discomforts of cam-

paigning in the cold and rainy season, were astounded and almost demoralized by the energetic measures of the new constable.

Accompanied by three thousand men-at-arms, nearly all of whom were of noble rank, Sir Bertrand marched to Pontorson, a frontier town between Normandy and Brittany, of which he had been appointed governor in recognition of his services in taking Melun, and there established his headquarters. His first care was to increase his army. This was comparatively easy; not only did his brilliant reputation for success attract soldiers of fortune, but he outbid the Black Prince in the matter of pay, in spite of the fact that the money granted him by the king fell far short of his requirements. On being remonstrated with by so redoubtable a baron as Oliver de Clisson for entering upon obligations of which he could not acquit himself, Sir Bertrand replied:

"If these people do not wage war against the king's enemies, they will assuredly make it upon his subjects, and they will pillage our poor peasants. This I cannot allow; and if the king will not pay them with his money, I will do so with my own."

And he did; though to raise it he disposed of much of his personal property, including his wife's jewels and a magnificent service of gold plate given her by King Henry of Castile in recognition of her husband's services. But the Lady Typhaine was as loyal, as generous, as large-hearted as her lord, and

felt it no sacrifice thus to serve France. The money so raised Sir Bertrand distributed among his captains to help pay their men, and in a short time between 12,000 and 15,000 men marched under the blazon of the "Eagle of Brittany."

Then began a series of forced marches and sudden attacks upon the English, who were unprepared for this aggressive warfare of the French. In six weeks Sir Bertrand carried positions and fortresses held by them as far as the Loire, compelling the English to retire before his progress in a manner that struck terror to their hearts.

Sir Bertrand was continuing his successful campaign southward when there came a messenger to him saying that a certain strongly fortified town in possession of the English could be easily taken on account of friends within, and this messenger was no other than the White Knight who had succeeded in concealing his identity from the people of that town on account of his lavish bestowal of gold, and who had barely escaped capture by Sir Hugh.

The great constable thereupon set out himself with a comparatively small force of men, the other divisions of his army being employed elsewhere, to take advantage of this bit of good fortune. As Sir Bertrand seldom encumbered himself with siege trains, taking towns by assault and thus making the enemy feed his men, the very next morning after the White Knight's encounter with Sir Hugh found

the constable accompanying him back to Blanc. He encamped that same night within a short distance of its gates, so as to be ready for the assault soon after daybreak.

It was for that reason that the alarm bell was rung so vigorously, calling the people to arms, while Sir Hugh's men were renewing their attack upon the inn. But the combatants paid no heed at first, they were too much engrossed with their own affairs. However, as the clangor of the bell continued, and the people flocked to the ramparts, and the town guards turned out, it began to be borne upon the consciousness of the combatants that something of a serious nature was going on without, especially as messengers were constantly arriving with urgent calls from the governor of the fortifications to Sir Hugh to come to his help. At length the Red Knight sounded the recall, and he and his men made their way to the walls, where they found an armed force regularly attacking the barriers.

The repulse was energetic. The archers cleared the walls and shot fast and true. Fire balls were brought into use, stones were hurled downward, the balisters hastily put in operation. Sir Hugh, recognizing the White Knight among the enemy, proposed a sortie, for the temerity of the stranger knight in entering the enemy's town and using the knowledge thus gained to its hurt had greatly exasperated him.

The attack was a furious one. Sir Bertrand, as

usual, was in the midst of the hottest action, and always near him was seen the banner of the White Knight. Having no scaling ladders, the French stuck their daggers and swords into the walls and mounted step by step thus aided under a shower of boiling oil and a hail of stones and clubs. Several times was the Breton knight hurled back into the moat, but every time he returned to the charge; but now the White Knight was no longer to be seen. Pikes and halberds were brought to bear against the ramparts, but just as they commenced making an impression on one corner of the wall, it seemed to those within the town that the French were seized by a panic, for they suddenly left the walls and began rapidly retreating.

"A rescue, a rescue!" yelled some one.

"Friends have arrived!" exclaimed another.

"The French are fleeing!"

"A sortie! A sortie!" shouted Sir Hugh.

This proposition met with general favor, the gates were thrown open, and a large number of men-at-arms rushed forth in pursuit of the apparently fleeing French. Then to their surprise, the French turned suddenly as if to make a detour of the walls. The English followed, to find that a gate on the side of the town had been opened to the enemy, and through which they were entering, the last ones shutting the great iron bound oaken door in their very faces. Back to the principal gate ran Sir Hugh

and his company, shouting as they went to warn the garrison of what had taken place. However, a singular thing had happened. The gate was still open, but it was the English who were pouring forth; so that in a very short time it was the English who were without the walls and the French who were within.

How this manœuvre had been effected the English could only conjecture.

In the mean time heavy fighting had been going on within the city, and at Sir Bertrand's side was a tall figure that still lacked the breadth of maturity, but its possessor was so dauntless, so agile, so dexterous, that he did the work as it seemed of two knights, and so effectually did he apply his battle-axe that, in spite of the confusion and necessary concentration of attention, the constable observed his efforts with high favor. From his accoutrements he was seen to be only a squire and not a knight, for by the latter part of the fourteenth century, though few of the rights and privileges of a knight belonged to a squire, he was permitted to carry a sword and his arms were almost the same, save in the matter of splendor; the apparel, armor, and accoutrements of a knight being of the richest quality, while those of a squire were much plainer.

When the city was finally in the possession of the French, Sir Hugh having been overpowered and obliged to surrender himself a prisoner again to Sir

Bertrand, the constable asked for the squire who had performed such valiant service.

When the youth stood before him, Sir Bertrand asked:

"Who art thou, and what is thy estate?"

The youth responded:

"I am Raimond, son of Sieur de Crèze, and squire of Sir Gaston d'Ambricicourt, who is now a prisoner."

"In faith, such valor as thine deserves knighthood, and thou shalt not leave the spot till it be conferred upon thee. Kneel!"

Raimond dropped upon his knee. Sir Bertrand tapped him upon the shoulder with the flat part of his sword, and bade him arise a full-fledged knight. Thus Raimond by his gallantry won the honor of receiving the accolade from the greatest warrior of his time, and he had well earned it.

Raimond had returned from Bocasse in due season and had joined the train of the White Knight, for he feared to travel with the large amount of gold in his possession attended by a small company. He had been greatly distressed on arriving at Limoges to learn that Sir Gaston had been removed. At first he could hear nothing of his destination, and he feared he had been taken to Bordeaux. He made inquiries on all sides, and after a while learned that the Red Knight had also departed. What would be more likely than the two should be together? Sir

Hugh had old scores to wipe out. In default of any other clew, he would follow Sir Hugh. To find the whereabouts of the Red Knight required no great detective skill, for he was a well-known character and was always attended by a large company whether at home or abroad. He traced him to the town of Blanc, the White Knight was also travelling northward, and they kept in company.

They found Blanc tolerably well garrisoned and strongly fortified; then it entered the mind of the White Knight to secure it for France. Therefore he and Raimond established themselves therein, attracting adherents to their standard, for the White Knight was also well supplied with gold. While the latter kept himself somewhat more secluded, Raimond made himself well acquainted with the town, its exits, the guards, and some of the townspeople. He was searching for his lord, but the idea of helping the French take the town commended itself to him; otherwise he did not see how prison doors could be unlocked. All his efforts to find if Sir Gaston were confined within the city were fruitless, for being brought by night, no one had seen his face, and his name had not been divulged. Only one or two of the warders even knew a prisoner was confined in the high tower in the wall, and they knew only because they were ordered daily to send up food and drink.

Evidently the only way to discover if the knight

were within the city was to enable the French to gain possession, and then after receiving the keys of the town, to make a thorough search. Raimond knew the Breton knight was a good friend of Sir Gaston's, and when the White Knight proposed that he should go northward in quest of Sir Bertrand and bring him back, Raimond gladly undertook to remain behind with a number of men, and while Sir Bertrand was making an attack at the front, to overpower the guards at a gate that was poorly defended because not near the point of attack, and open it, sending some one to inform the White Knight, who could lead the attacking force thither. As the inn was near the walls, it was agreed to open the gate close by if possible. Fortune favored them in making Sir Hugh attack the inn, for it drew attention from the outside. As soon as Sir Hugh ceased his attack and withdrew to the scene of conflict, Raimond and his men sallied forth ready armed as if to join the garrison. Instead, they had turned suddenly off, reached the side gate, overpowered the small guard stationed there, sent to the White Knight, who was on the lookout, and who then led part of the force around under the walls, while Sir Bertrand made a feint of retreating with the remainder so as to lure the garrison to attempt a sortie. The stratagem was successful. Sir Hugh had jumped at the bait, the governor of the fortifications furnishing him with additional men. What was their surprise to see the

army suddenly face about and make a stand. At the same time a great commotion was heard within the town, and it was found a large part of the enemy's force had entered it. Then Sir Hugh discovered himself hemmed in back and front, and was soon taken prisoner. So the result was that the French before night were in possession of another town, and Sir Bertrand and his men were so much the richer in prospect by the addition of many a pretty ransom, while Raimond received his knighthood. The White Knight alone seemed not to profit by the enterprise. He declared he wanted neither ransom nor honors, he was acting entirely in the service of France.

And so the French possessed themselves of the old town of Blanc, and levied tribute upon the wealth of the merchants, for it was Sir Bertrand's desire that war should not be waged against women, children, or the poor. As the fight had been a brisk one, and many were wounded, and their ransoms to be fixed, Sir Bertrand himself remained several days in the town before proceeding northward again. This time Raimond employed in trying to gain information regarding the Gascon knight, whom he hoped to be somewhere within the walls.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ENCOUNTER.

Sir Gaston had believed his fate sealed, and that he was to die alone in his eyrie prison, when day after day passed without bringing a sign from below. He could see nothing save the sky, and could hear still less, for the chamber was high and the walls thick. It had so happened that they who knew of his confinement in the tower had been killed or sorely wounded, and there was no one to inform the conquerors of his position or to attend to his needs.

He grew faint and weak for want of food and drink, in time his mind wandered, and he lost sense of time and place. He lived again through the happy days at Bocasse, and saw and heard the beloved object of his desires. Then one day he opened his eyes to see bending over him the fair, sweet face of Lady Yvette, as it seemed to him, and to hear her soft voice speak pitifully of him; and Raimond also was there; and he was content, for everything seemed as he would have it.

Again he woke and found himself in a strange room with strange faces about him, and his hand was taken by one, and a drink was placed to his lips

by another, and he was told to shut his eyes and sleep. And he must have done so, for when he opened them again Raimond was sitting beside him. But when he tried to ask him questions the youth told him he must not talk. And thus the days passed until he felt his old vigor return, and then without asking leave of any one, when left alone once, he arose and dressed himself, and descended to the eating room below and demanded hearty food. After eating he had asked for Raimond. Some one offered to send for him, but Sir Gaston would not permit; instead, he bade them conduct him to the youth at once. His attendant obeyed, and took him to the house of the commander of the fortifications where Sir Bertrand lodged, and with him Sir Raimond and the White Knight. When Sir Gaston was announced, both Sir Bertrand and Sir Raimond quickly advanced to greet him, but the White Knight quietly left the room without being observed by the visitor.

Then in answer to Sir Gaston's inquiries Raimond told how he had returned from Bocasse with the money, but could not find Sir Gaston; how, thinking Sir Hugh might be responsible for his disappearance, he had followed him; how the White Knight had proposed to take the city by surprise and strategy, and had journeyed northward in quest of Sir Bertrand, and how successfully the project had been carried out. But still no clew could they get of Sir

Gaston, until by chance Sir Raimond had heard a wounded soldier rave in his delirium about a prisoner to whom he must convey food and drink. He had tried to obtain from the sick man the place where the prisoner was confined, but could not till the man recovered his reason. This all took some days, and when at length Sir Bertrand received the key and opened the prison door, it was to find the knight insensible, apparently dead from lack of food.

So then Sir Gaston knew that all his pleasant fancies were but the fantasies of delirium, and he made no mention to any one of what he had thought to have seen nor of her who he thought had come to him.

The day arrived when Sir Bertrand said he would depart, for he was needed elsewhere. Sir Gaston had expected to accompany him, but there came a sudden summons for the lord constable to proceed to Paris as quickly as possible, but first to disband his army; and what was still worse, the king had omitted sending the money to pay the troops.

Bitter were the complaints of the constable against the courtiers about the king, who had advised him so wrongly. Said he:

"If the king would have paid my army, all Guienne would have been conquered; and here I am obliged to send away my poor soldiers in the depth of winter without a denier!"

However, the constable succeeded in obtaining the money to pay off the soldiers, but there were no new conquests that winter; while if Sir Bertrand had been permitted to carry on his operations he might have materially shortened the Hundred Years' War.

It was, therefore, out of the question to journey with the constable, so when Sir Raimond begged Sir Gaston to accompany him southward and to travel in the train of the White Knight, as Sir Gaston then had no suite, the Gascon knight, seeing nothing else opening at present, agreed. As Sir Bertrand proceeded northward, the White Knight and his suite, including Sir Gaston and Sir Raimond, set out southward.

Now the Red Knight had been given his liberty by Sir Bertrand on receiving his parole, for he believed him more secure thus than behind iron bars in a place where he had many friends, till he could raise the money for his ransom. That took no more time than to go to his nearest fortress castle and return, so before the departure of the Breton Knight, the ransom of Sir Hugh was safely delivered, and he was again a free man.

Now Sir Hugh decided to return to St. Brice after collecting a large company to retake his castle, for he did not know that all its fortifications had been razed to the ground. So it happened that he set out soon after the departure of the White Knight. As the company of the latter was small, he having paid

off and dismissed his mercenaries, the evil thought came into the mind of Sir Hugh to be avenged on the White Knight and to recapture the Gascon knight at the same time. So he sent couriers here and there to collect mercenaries, and when he had collected a number sufficiently large, he set out full speed to overtake the White Knight and his company.

It was a day or two, however, before they reported that they whom they sought were but a little in advance. By taking a detour it would be easy to head them off, or to lie in ambush till they should pass by. Sir Hugh decided upon the latter course. The White Knight and his companions were not far from Bocasse; that night would end their journey for the present. Raimond had said that the White Knight had also promised to tarry a while at the château of Lady Yvette. Had Sir Gaston been less occupied with his own thoughts, less intent upon devising some means to avenge himself upon Sir Hugh, which divided his attention with the desire of once more meeting the Lady of Bocasse, which he was afraid he might not do, for Raimond said the lady was not in the castle when he departed therefrom, he might have felt some curiosity regarding the White Knight, who evinced a great preference for his own society, riding at the head of his company and generally alone, having his meals by himself, and sleeping in his tent without attendants. But knights were a-plenty, and if this pretended one had a desire for

seclusion, Sir Gaston had not the slightest objection to the indulgence of his humor.

It was not yet noon. The company was proceeding at a good pace, when in a narrow ravine there suddenly sprang out from thick woods lining either side of the road a party of armed men. Several of the White Knight's squires were in advance and were soon overpowered. As the White Knight rode quickly to the aid of his squires, he was met by the most powerful knight of the attacking party, who devoted his whole attention to him. In a moment the White Knight divined that it was Sir Hugh de Beverly, and that it meant a duel to the death. Sir Hugh was on foot, the White Knight was mounted, the advantage being thus far with the latter, who tried to run Sir Hugh down and to crush him under his horse. In spite of his heavy armor, Sir Hugh managed to evade being thrown, while his object was to unseat the White Knight. They were at close quarters, men were fighting hard behind them, but the way was clear in front. The White Knight put spurs to his horse, which sprang forward and would have soon carried its rider out of danger had not Sir Hugh raised his battle-axe and swung it with such force against the animal as to make it stagger and stop. He followed the blow quickly with another, this time on the forehead. So heavy was the blow that the axe crashed through the mail and the poor horse fell. In an instant the White Knight was out

of the saddle and on his feet, but the Red Knight was too quick for him; raising his battle-axe again, he swung it around his head and directed it full against the breast of the White Knight. It came with crushing force, but was arrested by another battle-axe that had been also raised, and the two met in mid air. As the two axes were interlocked for a moment, their two holders stood glaring at each other from behind closed visors, and Sir Hugh found himself confronted by another opponent, one nearer his own size.

Recognizing the device of Sir Gaston d'Ambricicourt on his opponent's shield, Sir Hugh knew that the combat meant death to one of them. He had no doubt as to which one, for Sir Gaston had but recently arisen from a sick bed, while he was in his full health and strength. But Sir Gaston's arm was strengthened by the passions of hate and revenge; not only that, for Sir Hugh was equally inspired by these evil passions, but Sir Gaston felt himself the avenger of her who was above all other women to him. He took no heed of himself, he was conscious only of a mighty destroying force, that opportunity made the more deadly.

The two men, after glaring at each other for a moment, sprang backward; then gathering fresh impetus, each flung himself on the other with such terrific force that both were almost thrown. The rest stopped fighting; all seemed to realize that the issue depended upon the conflict between these two.

Again and again the two knights tried to strike each other with their battle-axes, but every time were they caught in mid-air. Then suddenly, with demoniacal fury, all rules of combat seemingly forgotten, Sir Hugh sprang backward, and with the quickness of light flashed his battle-axe around his head twice, then hurled it with the impetus thus gained at the Gascon knight. But he had seen its coming, and dodging the weapon, sprang forward, and with a swift blow clave the breastplate of Sir Hugh. In spite of the fierceness of the attack Sir Hugh did not fall; drawing his sword, he made a lunge at Sir Gaston, and with an upward dexterous turn succeeded in unhelmeting him. Just then a loud cry came from some one among the spectators, but all were too much occupied with watching the combat to notice from which one. Sir Gaston was at a great disadvantage, for his head was exposed to the foe. This he did not seem to take into account, but rushed upon Sir Hugh, who lunged again at him, this time with his sword; Sir Gaston made a feint, and parried Sir Hugh, then suddenly threw himself against him so violently as to take him off his feet. Both men went down, but Sir Gaston was on top. Then men from both sides advanced and tried to separate the combatants, but they were like raging wild beasts, seeing nothing save each other. Sir Hugh succeeded in freeing his right arm, and seizing his dagger plunged it into Sir Gaston's throat;

the latter struck his arm aside, not soon enough, however, to save himself, and then thrust his own dagger under Sir Hugh's helmet and severed the jugular vein. Both men gasped, the blood spurted from the throat of each. Quick hands attended them, but the Lady Yvette was avenged, for Sir Hugh never breathed again.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT BOCASSE ONCE MORE.

Sir Gaston was not quite dead, though he had a gaping wound in his throat. The flow of blood was staunched, the White Knight performing that service, while some one rode to the nearest town for a litter. Thus was the Gascon knight conveyed to Bocasse, and again was he brought back to health by Nurse Alinore, who had survived the vicissitudes of the house of Bocasse.

The anxiety she had suffered while her nursling was a prisoner of Sir Hugh de Beverly had whitened her hair and bowed her form. After the Lady Yvette's abduction, Nurse Alinore had sought refuge in a convent, as the Red Knight's attendants did not attempt to retain any of the *serviteurs* who had accompanied their lady from the château on permission of its captor. She had remained in the convent till word was brought her of the recapture of Bocasse by the Gascon knight, then she had hastened back to the castle, expecting to find there her nursling, so great was her faith in the prowess of Sir Gaston d'Ambricicourt. Sadly was she disappointed when

she found Sir Gaston knew no more concerning the fate of Lady Yvette than she did. Still, it was some consolation to know that measures were being taken to discover the place of her captivity and to effect her rescue.

Many were the confidences given her by Sir Gaston while he was awaiting news from Sir Raimond or the return of Messire de Bonciel. Some comfort did he receive in return, for Nurse Alinore felt she could die in peace did she know that she would leave her darling under the protection of so gallant and valiant a gentleman as the Gascon knight.

"But if she does not hate me, why should she flout me?" asked the knight in some perplexity.

"Maids' ways are not the ways of men," was the rather vague reply. "The Lady Yvette would be wooed for herself and not on account of her domains."

"A pest on the domains! Would that the earth were to open and swallow them!"

"Or that they be given to the Red Knight?"

"*Nom du diable*, no!" shouted Sir Gaston. "Not one rood of land, not one stone of the castle, not one head of cattle shall he take!"

"But he has more than all, he has our lady," sighed Nurse Alinore.

Then did Sir Gaston spring to his feet and vow he would go in quest of her at dawn on the morrow. He would have gone off to give his orders at once

had not Nurse Alinore pleaded with him to wait yet a little.

"What would become of Bocasse if none remain to protect it?" she asked.

"A plague take Bocasse! 'Tis the lady I want. But one more day will I wait.

Up to the highest watch tower he strode and vainly scanned the roads, hoping to catch sight of a messenger at the very least. A watch was kept night and day, with instructions to report to Sir Gaston the first moment any one appeared, so that no time would be lost in starting.

At length, one day, came Messire de Bonciel; his arrival was immediately followed by Sir Gaston's departure. Then ensued a time of sickening suspense to the good old woman. No tidings came to her of knight, maid, or squire. The hair grew whiter, the figure more bowed, the face more seamed as the weeks went by. Then came the joyful day when Lady Yvette returned, pale and wan, it is true, but happy to be once more in her old home and again her own mistress. Not a word did she tell of Sir Hugh's treatment or threats. Yet Nurse Alinore noticed a great change in her darling. There were curves about the beautiful mouth that had not been there before her abduction, and which told of suffering. The brilliancy of the fine eyes was dimmed, while the lady was subject to times of depression for which she would give no reason. What caused the change

the good nurse could only conjecture. Good nursing, gentle care, and her native air soon brought back the roundness to the limbs and color to cheeks and lips. The fire returned to the eyes, and the dauntless spirit was still unbroken.

Nurse Alinore was a happy woman when her brave knight was once more brought within the walls of Bocasse. Perhaps now would be explained the cause of her nursling's sadness.

If Nurse Alinore was delighted to receive again Sir Gaston, he was still more delighted to be back in his old chamber, and to be the object of the gentle ministrations of his attentive nurse. More blissful yet, however, was the day when the lady of the castle was permitted to visit him, and he was allowed to kiss the hand for which he had risked so much.

Tender, gentle, gay, was now the young châtelaine. But press her as he would, no word could he get from her regarding her stay at St. Brice. Always she met his questions with another, or with a jest, or with a plea not to be reminded of that hateful time. She sang to him, talked to him, played chess with him, and made the days pass for him like an unbroken dream of happiness. His heart again beat high with hope. Surely must she now regard him with favor, else her manner would not be so sweet and gentle toward him.

Once he asked after the White Knight. If he

had been injured, and if he, too, were an inmate of Château Bocasse.

Lady Yvette replied that the White Knight had been unharmed only by reason of Sir Gaston's timely aid, that he had not remained at Bocasse, but would return before Sir Gaston's departure therefrom to make acknowledgment of his obligations for his rescue.

"He owes me nothing," said Sir Gaston. "I fought Sir Hugh on my own account. Not only had he served me ill, for that could I have made him pay with less than his life; but he had sorely injured one whom I hold dearer than myself. It was for that reason I was obliged to kill him."

"Then, when thou attacked him, hadst thou no thought of the White Knight's peril?" asked Lady Yvette.

"None, madame. The White Knight is nothing to me."

"Nothing, my lord?"

"Nothing, madame."

"Art quite sure?"

"Quite sure, madame."

Then the Lady Yvette spoke no more, but went away, and Sir Gaston did not see her again that day.

The time came when Nurse Alinore pronounced Sir Gaston well enough to leave his chamber. He was to descend that very morning to the banqueting room for the first time since he had again been so

nigh unto death. There came a page to tell him that the White Knight had arrived and begged the honor of seeing Sir Gaston. He was awaiting him in the hall below.

Accordingly, a little later, Sir Gaston was conducted to the great apartment where he had had his first interview with Lady Yvette, though not his first meeting. The White Knight was not visible. Sir Raimond was there, and came forward to meet him. Taking him by the hand he led him to the dais where Lady Yvette was awaiting him. As he approached, the lady said:

"The White Knight would have speech with you, my lord."

Sir Gaston, finding himself face to face with Lady Yvette, bowed, and taking the hand extended toward him, raised it to his lips. As he relinquished it, he answered:

"Gladly would I see him, madame, but more glad am I to kiss this hand."

Straightening up to his great height, he glanced about him in quest of the White Knight.

"The White Knight would thank you for your valiant service, my lord," said Lady Yvette.

"Tell him, madame, that I require no thanks. I but settled my own score with Sir Hugh de Beverly."

"Give your own messages, my lord."

"But where may the White Knight be, madame?"

"He stands before you, my lord," was the reply.

Sir Gaston started. Why had he not suspected it? Many things flashed upon his memory that once he had not quite understood, but which now seemed quite plain, and he wondered he had not discovered that fact long ago.

But Lady Yvette was speaking:

"Receive, Sir Knight, my most heartfelt thanks. Had it not been for thy strong arm, I should have been lying under ground instead of Sir Hugh. No words of mine can express my gratitude. My thanks are little; thou shouldst have greater guerdon."

Lady Yvette had carefully prepared this speech, thinking to give the knight opportunity again to prefer his request for the hand of the Maid of Bocasse. Instead he remained silent.

"That you had no thought to save the life of the White Knight does not lessen the weight of obligation," she added as he did not answer.

Then Sir Gaston made reply, as if forcing himself to speak:

"Had I known it was the life of madame that was in jeopardy, then would my arm have been quicker even if not surer."

All the while he was thinking that Lady Yvette's graciousness had been prompted by gratitude, not love, and his heart grew so heavy that it oppressed his organs of speech. However, he tried to rally from his dejection, and at dinner, which soon followed, he endeavored to entertain his fair hostess

and her ladies; so, also, Lady Yvette tried to be gay; but her gayety was forced. Her heart, too, was heavy, for disappointment weighed it down. A knight's fancy soon roamed. Since seizing the treasures of La Tayac, he had no longer desire for Bocasse. Other maids there were in plenty as fair as she, and no doubt there was one more desirable in the eyes of the Gascon Knight.

Each tried to conceal the disappointment caused by the other. Each tried to entertain and to appear to be entertained. Each succeeded so well that each deceived the other. After dinner they repaired to the perron, where spiced wine was brought, and the Lady Yvette challenged the knight to a game of chess, while the other ladies and gentlemen amused themselves in their several ways. When the sun was sinking in the west, they walked in the orchard under flowering fruit trees, for it was now spring in the south of France.

Later the moon shone out, lyres were produced and there was singing to their soft accompaniment,—such a delightful time and opportunity for lovers! Yet true love had made Sir Gaston modest, and what was plain to the others was hidden from them most concerned. How fair Lady Yvette appeared in the soft light of the spring moon, how desirable! Her nearness was distracting. Sir Gaston felt he could endure it no longer, he must go away and forget! Never before had woman held him so; in fact, no

woman had pleased him long save the one whom, do as he would, he could not succeed in pleasing. Of all these things he was thinking as he sat near the Maid of Bocasse, who, in spite of her proximity, was so unapproachable. Though vowing to himself he could not endure the situation another moment, when the lady said the hour was late and she must withdraw, he longed to detain her. How gladly would she have been detained! Instead, she withdrew to her apartment, not to sleep, but to pass the night lying on her bed with wide open eyes, smarting under the shame of being as she thought repulsed by the man she loved. Yet, despite her slighted love, her heart was filled with gratitude toward Sir Gaston for ridding the earth of him who was her humiliation so long as he lived. Those were times of less nicety in moral distinctions. Honor was more than life; still, the idea of what constitutes honor varies with the age. It is that which the consensus of opinion holds to be admirable, and in all stages of civilization man seeks the admiration of his fellows.

To Lady Yvette death alone could efface the injury done her outraged young womanhood by Sir Hugh's cowardly threat. Had it not been for Sir Gaston, Bocasse would not now have been hers, neither would Sir Bertrand have succeeded in his attack on St. Brice without Sir Gaston's timely arrival; therefore, to him she owed also her rescue from the robber's castle. Last of all, and least to

Lady Yvette, he had saved her life, unwittingly though it might be, in his desire to avenge himself on the Red Knight for injury done one dearer than himself. Who might such a one be? Was it man or woman? If woman, it explained his present indifference to Bocasse and its châtelaine.

Thus the night passed in a whirl of torturing thought. When morning came, as soon as the *serviteurs* were stirring, she dressed herself for riding and went below. Attended by two grooms, she galloped hard and far, as if seeking to outrun thought, though it was scarcely safe for her to go so far from the castle without an armed escort.

Neither did Sir Gaston sleep. His determination was taken long before the coming of dawn. He would depart from Bocasse at once. By making the journey in easy stages he could reach the home of his childhood, and there among his own *serviteurs* recover his strength and be ready to offer his services to his king. He would go northward and visit the court of King Charles, and there perhaps learn to forget.

He sent to the châtelaine in the morning and begged leave to bid her farewell, but was told the lady had already gone abroad. When the dinner hour came and passed and madame did not return, he sought Nurse Alinore and asked to leave a message for her lady.

"It would be better for messire to give his own messages," replied the old woman.

"But I cannot see her, and I must depart within the hour if I would start this day."

"Would messire leave Bocasse without taking leave of its lady personally? Surely would she be grieved and with just cause."

"It grieves me still more to see her and speak with her and hold her hand to my lips and feel that she cares naught for me," he answered, dejectedly.

"Has messire spoken?".

"Of what use? Does not her every word and action show that she holds me as but one who has served her well?"

"Madame is indeed deeply grateful to messire," suggested Nurse Alinore.

"I care naught for her gratitude."

"May not gratitude inspire love?"

"Tell me, good nurse, does the lady favor another?"

"*Hélàs*, I know not. Much has her manner discomfited me since her return from St. Brice."

"How doth her manner affect thee?"

"As the manner of one in love, but who would conceal the fact."

"Then is there no chance for me!" he said.

"Still, messire might ask. It will be of satisfaction later, even though the answer be not favorable."

"Speak for me, good nurse, and I will defer my departure yet another day."

"Indeed will I, messire, if madame will permit."

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

THE early dinner was over when Lady Yvette returned, so she had bread and wine brought to her apartment. Nurse Alinore took the light refreshment to her young mistress, thinking to use the opportunity to plead the knight's cause. But Lady Yvette was in no mood for talking. After she had sipped her wine and eaten a little of the bread, she said:

"Come, good nurse, loosen my hair and brush it. I would sleep, for my canter has wearied me and made me drowsy."

"First would I have a few words with thee," said Nurse Alinore, as she unbraided the beautiful luxuriant tresses of the young châtelaine.

"Be brief, then, my good nurse, else will this sleepiness pass."

It was not a propitious moment, still Nurse Alinore thought to venture on her delicate mission.

"Messire d'Ambricicourt hath been seeking thee, *chérie*, to bid thee good-by. He says he must depart on the morrow at the latest."

"So soon," murmured Lady Yvette, her heart

sinking. "His strength seems scarcely yet equal to a journey." She pretended to try to stifle a yawn.

"So I told him, madame. Then he talked much with me."

"He can talk with my nurse, but not with me. She knows more of his affairs than I," was Lady Yvette's quick conclusion, which, like most quick conclusions, was not altogether correct. "If he would I should know of his affairs, he would tell me himself," she said aloud. "Now leave me, for I would sleep, else will I not be able to hold my eyes open this evening."

Lady Yvette did not sleep; her heart was too sore. At supper time she appeared even more beautiful than ever, it seemed to the knight, to whom the lady grew fairer every day.

"You were seeking me, my lord," she said, half questioningly.

"Yes, madame, to tell you that I have accepted too long of your hospitality."

"I fear our welcome has been lacking, my lord, to make you say that."

"In very truth, no, madame. Never was knight treated more——" he stopped—graciously was what he meant to say; but was it gracious to inspire love only to deny it?

Fortunately he was saved the necessity of finishing his sentence, for at that moment an attendant appeared:

"Madame is served."

Together they went into the supper room. Neither lady nor knight was as entertaining as usual, both were thinking it would be the last time they supped together.

As it was the custom of the ladies and gentlemen of the household to promenade in the orchard in the early evening of these soft spring days, Lady Yvette felt it would be too marked for her to stay within that night, so she led the way to the pleasure grounds under the shadow of the walls, with Sir Gaston on one side and one of her women on the other. The conversation was fitful; none found much to say. Sir Gaston was longing for a word alone with the lady, and was thinking how he might procure it, for etiquette was such that he was never alone with her. It must be by some ruse if he would succeed in evading the attendant. At that very moment there came a shower of fruit blossoms from the tree under which they were passing. Looking up, they saw Sir Raimond's handsome boyish face peering down roguishly at them from its branches. Sir Gaston stopped.

"Pluck me two branches of the fairest blossoms thou canst find, my good Raimond," he cried, "for the two fairest and sweetest of ladies."

Raimond complied; but instead of tossing both sprays to Sir Gaston, he retained one of them, and slipping to the ground, presented it to the demoiselle

who attended Lady Yvette, for whom he felt a great admiration. That proceeding mightily pleased Sir Gaston, for, while Sir Raimond was engaging the attention of the other lady, he gradually led Lady Yvette into a side path, she being apparently too listless to notice that the attendant was not with her.

When out of earshot of every one but his companion, Sir Gaston said:

"'Tis our last walk together, madame."

Lady Yvette started, saying, after a brief pause:

"I fear you are in too great haste to leave us for your own good, my lord."

"'Tis for my good I must be going," he answered.

To this Lady Yvette could think of no suitable reply till the time had passed for making one.

"I owe you more than I can ever repay," he added as she did not speak.

"No, my lord; the debt is mine. Have you not saved my castle and my life?"

"And is it not to the White Knight I owe my liberty, aye, my life? Had it not been for your arrival I should have long since died."

"To Raimond, my lord."

"Nay, madame; Raimond did much, and I bless him for it, and shall try to requite him; but whose was the scheme that effected my rescue? Whose also was the device that saved me at Roncesvalles?"

Again Lady Yvette was silent.

"I cannot but deem myself honored above all knights that so fair a lady has attempted so much for my sake."

"I owed you so much, my lord."

"Yes, yes, madame, I understand. It is not necessary to remind me so often that gratitude alone prompted your efforts in my behalf." His tone was almost angry. "I would there were less gratitude, and more——"

"More what, my lord?" came faintly from Lady Yvette; but Sir Gaston was heaving such a deep sigh at the perverseness of fate that he did not catch her words. Lady Yvette did not repeat her question, so they walked on in silence till they came to the end of the *allée*, where Sir Gaston turned back again instead of taking the path that would have led him to the rest of the company.

"I wished to bid you farewell alone, madame; to-morrow's parting will be public."

Lady Yvette gave a sidelong glance up into his face. What did he have to say to her that he could not say before all the world? Evidently nothing, for he walked by her side in apparent self-absorption. He was feeling all the while that he could not leave Bocasse without telling its lady that he still loved her. It would at least make her think of him when he was gone. But how could be speak of earthly love to a beautiful statue as unapproachable

as that of a fair saint enshrined over the portal of some cathedral!

And all the while Lady Yvette was thinking how flat life would seem after the morrow.

By this time they had reached the other end of the *allée.* Again Sir Gaston turned, Lady Yvette passively following. The two seemed greatly changed; for where was the former audacity of the maid and the usual effrontery of the knight?

The moon ascended higher, and Sir Gaston could see the curls that the soft night wind blew about the fair face beside him.

"The air is sweet, the weather bids to be fair," remarked Lady Yvette at length.

"After to-night, no night will be sweet, nor any day fair," replied the knight dejectedly.

Again Lady Yvette gave that sidelong glance, and there stole a soft smile about the red lips, and a soft light flashed from the blue eyes that was not a reflection of the moonlight.

"And why may they not be?" she asked, crushing the spray of blossoms between her fingers.

"The light of my life will be swallowed up in the shadows of night," he replied, with a sigh that again attested the soundness of his lungs.

"Another may arise," she suggested.

"There is no light for me save the one that I'm losing."

"Then it is not already gone?"

"Aye; for I never possessed it."

Lady Yvette found it difficult to afford the comfort evidently expected of her on such vague information.

Just then came a shout: "Holà! Holà!"

"We are wanted," said Lady Yvette. Then Sir Gaston seized her by the arm and, turning her toward him, demanded in tones more authoritative than wooing:

"Tell me why thou art so cruelly sweet and so coldly cruel?"

She did not answer immediately, but stood looking up at him from under her lowered lids, while a little mocking smile curved her lips. Sir Gaston's face was dark; but as the knight's scowl grew deeper, the lady's smile grew softer.

They stood so near together that Sir Gaston's breath stirred her hair, but she made no attempt to withdraw.

"Why dost thou ever repulse me?" he cried. "Thou drawest me to thee with one hand and pushest me from thee with the other!"

"That is because, my lord——" she paused.

"Why is it?" In his almost angry impatience Sir Gaston came very near shaking her.

"It is because, my lord,—because—thou wilt not be drawn with both."

He started and looked more closely into the bewitching face that was regarding him with so soft a

light in the eyes and the half-loving, half-mocking smile upon the lips. Then the moon shone out clear and full, and the veil was lifted from his eyes, and he read in that lovely face all that was in that loving heart.

And so the farewell was not spoken. The lady had been the first to discover the cross purposes at which they had been playing, and again had come to the rescue of her own true knight.

* * * * * * *

And thus ended the story of the Maid of Bocasse, who was soon no longer a maid, but a wife, and later the mother of a fine family of children. Sir Gaston won high renown as a warrior, and became the possessor of other rich fiefs; for he fought under the standard of Sir Bertrand, whose arms were victorious till death stopped short his career. Raimond also made a name for himself; while Joli-cœur, though never again able to stand upon his feet after the terrible ordeal through which he had passed during his imprisonment at St. Brice, lived for many years an honored and cherished servitor of the lady for whom he had suffered so much, enlivening many a winter's afternoon with his marvellous tales.

The loss of his eldest son had so impaired the already failing health of the Black Prince that he did not live many years after his return to England, dying in London, July 8, 1376, greatly lamented by the English people, who had been looking forward

with great expectations to his accession to the throne, when it should please Providence to remove his father, Edward III. His chivalric virtues, his magnificence, his munificence, above all the success that had ever attended his arms, had greatly endeared him to the English people; while his courtesy, liberality, and affability, attracted to him all with whom he was associated, foe as well as friend. Though obstinate in purpose, inflexible in judgment, stern, even cruel, in anger, his virtues far outbalanced his faults; though liberal with gold taken from his subjects, with no thought for the lowly and poor, both his virtues and failings were those of the age in which he lived,—that much-vaunted Age of Chivalry.

The character of Sir Bertrand du Guesclin, the other illustrious knight of that period, does not appeal to the imagination so strongly as that of his contemporary, but his virtues were no less prominent, while his sympathies were broader, for they included the poor and the weak. He always warned his men never to make war on the poor, women, or children, and in his sympathy for the people of France he was exceeded only by the heroic Maid of Orleans, who gave up her life on account of the love she had for "the poor people of France." Sir Bertrand died July 4, 1380, leaving a young widow, his second wife; and to her, fifty years later, Jeanne d'Arc sent the ring she wore as a girl to testify the veneration she felt for the memory of him who had

tried to expel the English invader and oppressor, and to save France for the French.

Edward III. died in 1377, a year after the death of his illustrious son, and was succeeded by the little son of the Black Prince, the weak and unfortunate Richard II. During the boy king's minority Charles V., King of France, hoped to recover all that the English had wrested from his father, but the death of Sir Bertrand and of himself that year defeated his purpose.

Then followed the reign of the mad king, Charles VI. of France, which, as Sully remarks in his memoirs, was so pregnant of sinister events,—the grave of good laws and morals in France.

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